

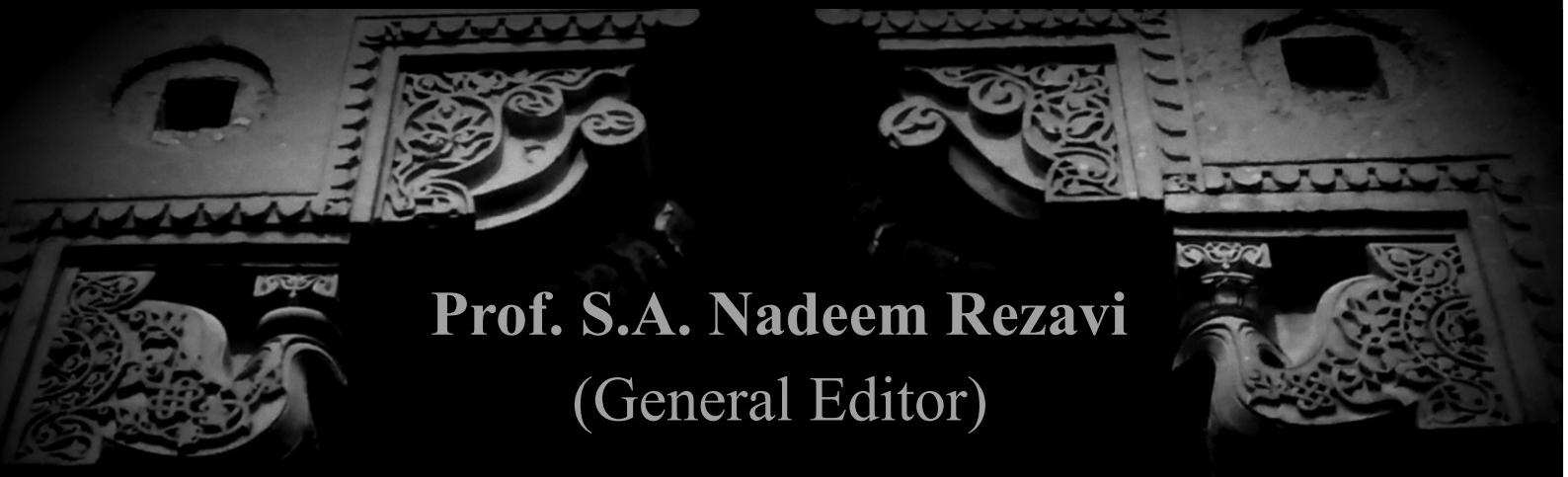


# **Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS)**

A Quarterly Journal

Vol. I Issue: 04

October-December 2017



**Prof. S.A. Nadeem Rezavi**  
(General Editor)

**Lubna Irfan**  
(Editor)

**Asra Alavi**  
(Joint Editor)

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## From the General Editor's Desk

With this issue of the Bulletin we have completed one full year of our academic programme which included the weekly seminars and the publication of select papers. Our initial issues were mostly devoted to student's and research scholar's contributions. Our first three numbers were only in the form of an e-journal which were uploaded on the CAS Department of History's web page from where they can be accessed. This fourth number of the volume one to is being uploaded and can be accessed from the same site. This time we are also coming up with its print version. This issue has only one student contribution, a review article. Most of the other articles are reprints of some important contributions of major historians, viz., Professors Mohammad Habib, D.D. Kosambi, Richard M Eaton and Shireen Moosvi. We also requested Professor Ishrat Alam to write a short piece for us. I also pressed my student editor, Lubna to include one of my articles as well! This has happened not because there were no student presentations in the weekly seminars. This has been done deliberately for two purposes: one, to further the original purpose of the Sultania Historical Society, which I had elaborated upon in the first issue of this Bulletin; and two, to face the atmosphere prevailing in the country which is belittling historical facts and creating Myths!

Myth and History is a matter which has been in the news lately. There are some myths taken to be historical facts which are in themselves harmless creations of popular misunderstandings. Some have been inspired in the face of deliberate agendas. Others, which are of more recent origins, are more vicious and a result of hate propaganda. The toxicity of myth making has been growing leaps and bounds in the last few decades. At least since the coming of the regressive saffron communal brigade, the distinction between myth and History has gradually eroded. History has been reduced to mythical tales carefully and deliberately crafted to further the communal and divisive agenda! So much so that those who did not exist in the pages of history are now supposed to be the real makers of our past!

All the contributions in this issue ( except the book review) are devoted to this extremely relevant theme – a theme which the Indian History Congress has declared to be a theme of its annual symposium for 2018 at the forthcoming Pune session.

I thank all my students and colleagues who made the publication of this issue possible. I thank Professor Shireen Moosvi for allowing us to reproduce her extremely enchanting paper on the myth of Anarkali. I also thank Professor Ishrat Alam for taking time out to write a note for us. Hopefully Professor Richard Eaton won't mind that we are reproducing his paper which destroys the myth of temple demolition. I am also thankful to the young energetic Zainab who is a fantastic student and a beautiful human being for reviewing a book of Romila Thapar for us. And who can forget Lubna, my student and real Editor of this Bulletin, and her team mates, Asra and Layma who really laboured in choosing the papers to be included in the issue and typing and re-typing them.

The hard copy would not have been possible without the active support of Mr Moinuddin who promised to print it and deliver it on time. Mr. Nadeem Ahmad always helps us in uploading it on our website.

Last but not the least, I bow my head to my guru, Professor Irfan Habib to whom I run to when any problem arises. Without him nothing would have been possible!

Hope you will all benefit from this issue of the Bulletin!

**(Professor Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi)**  
Chairman & Coordinator  
CAS, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

# Editor's Comment

The fourth issue of Bulletin of Sultania Historical Society (BOSHS) is an attempt to bring to focus the pertinent issue of understanding History and its difference from a Myth. The intellectual domain has constantly been subjected to a serious debate around the questions of what is History; where does it begin and the myth ends and how looking back at the past from different perspectives challenges the sanctity of the factually established truth. By bringing forth a series of arguments from diverse perspectives, this edition not only furthers the issue of better understanding the past but also aims at developing a more nuanced understanding of history and historiography.

In this issue we are reproducing pioneering works on the larger theme of Myth and History; the first article by D. D. Kosambi, highlights the economic and social aspects that lay at the base of the religious text *Bhagavad Gita*. The articles presented in this issue also try to bridge the gap that lies between the past and the present. It takes up contemporary issues that affect the modern imagination and traces their roots to the past. Thus the articles related to the issue of temple desecration by Richard Eaton and the myths around the medieval ruler Mahmud of Ghazna by Mohammad Habib, serve as important reminders against the propaganda which others the Muslim community in India. Apart from these there are some detailed works on the myths created and perpetuated in the popular culture through cinema and other means, the characters of Anarkali and Padmavati have been brought to terms with the historical facts in articles by Prof. Shireen Moosvi on the Myth of Anarkali and by Prof. Ishrat Alam on the character of Rani Padmavati. Apart from the importance of busting the myths perpetuated by the popular culture, there is also an attempt at historicizing the common notions current in the public imagination regarding important historical spaces and structures, thus the common myths regarding the abandonment of Fathpur Sikri as a capital have been challenged by Prof. S.A. Nadeem Rezavi in his article.

In addition to these articles, the journal also provides a book review of Romila Thapar's *Time as a Metaphor of History* by one of the M.A. (Previous) students of the Department, Ms. Zainab Naqvi.

Thus it can be said that this issue is not just an attempt at sharing and gaining from the academic works of the pioneering historians on Indian history, but it also is an exercise in relating the subject of history to the larger political, social and cultural scenarios of the contemporary.

This issue of the journal is a result of untiring labour of the Joint- Editor Ms. Asra Alavi, who has worked day and night reading, re-reading and editing the articles presented. Apart from her, gratitude is also due to other students from the Department namely, Ms. S. Zainab Naqvi, Ms. Layma Parween, Mr. Anayat Khan, Mr. Basharat Saleem Parray, Mr. Mohd Asif, Mr. Sidhhant and others who have contributed in their own capacities to this issue. I, also am grateful to people who have always managed to show up on every Saturday for the Student Seminars which form the backbone of the Sultania Historical Society. We look forward to more such engagements.

-Lubna Irfan  
Research Scholar  
Centre of Advanced Study  
Department of History, AMU

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## SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE *BHAGAVAD-GITA*

(Excerpt from *Myth and Reality: Studies in the Formation of Indian Culture*, First published in 1962)

-D.D. Kosambi



Fig. 1: Artistic rendition of a war scene from Mahabharata depicting Arjun and Krishna

The Bhagavad-Gita, "Song of the Blessed One", forms part of the great Indian epic Mahabharata. Its 18 adhyaya chapters contain the report by Sanjaya of a dialogue between the Pandava hero Arjuna and his Yadu Charioteer Krsna, the eighth incarnation of Visnu. The actual fighting is about to begin when Arjuna feels revulsion at the leading part which he must play in the impending slaughter of cousins and kinsmen. The exhortations of Lord Krsna answer every doubt through a complete philosophical cycle, till Arjuna is ready to bend his whole mind, no longer divided against itself, to the great killing. The Gita has attracted minds of bents entirely different from each other and from that of Arjuna. Each has interpreted the supposedly divine words so differently from all the others that the original seems far more suited to raise doubts and to split a personality than to heal an inner division. Any moral philosophy which managed to receive so many variant interpretations from minds developed in widely different types of society must be highly

equivocal. No question remains of its basic validity if the meaning be so flexible. Yet the book has had its uses.

If a Mahabharata war had actually been fought on the scale reported, nearly five million fighting men killed each other in an 18-day battle between Delhi and Thanesar; about 130,000 chariots (with their horses), an equal number of elephants and thrice that many riding horses were deployed. This means at least as many camp-followers and attendants as fighters. A host of this size could not be supplied without a total population of 200 millions, which India did not attain till the British period, and could not have reached without plentiful and cheap iron and steel for ploughshares and farmers tools. Iron was certainly not available in any quantity to Indian peasants before the 6th century BC. The greatest army camp credibly reported was of 400,000 men under Candragupta Maurya, who commanded the surplus of the newly developed Gangetic basin. The

terms patti,gulma etc., given as tactical units in the Mbh did not acquire that meaning till after the Mauryans. The heroes fought with bows and arrows from their chariots, as if the numerous cavalry did not exist; but cavalry which appeared comparatively late in ancient Indian warfare made the fighting chariots obsolete as was proved by Alexander in the Punjab.

The epic began, like the early Homeric chants, as a series of lays sung at the court of the conquerors. The lament was thinly veiled, presumably by irony; the defeated Kurus survived in legend (e.g. the Kuru-dhamma-jataka) as unsurpassable in rectitude and nobility of character. Krsna-Narayana had no role to play even in the first connected epic narrative. Should the reader doubt all this, let him read the final cantos of the extant Mbh. The Pandavas come in the end to disgraceful old age, and unattended death in the wilderness. Their opponents are admitted to heaven as of right, but the heroes are only transferred there from the tortures of hell, after a long and stubborn effort by the eldest brother Yudhstihira, It strikes even the most casual eye that this is still the older heaven of India and Yama; Krsna-Narayana is not its dominant figure, but a palpable and trifling insertion in a corner.

Those legendary Utopians, the: pure, and unconquerable Uttara Kurus of the Digha Nikaya(DN 32) and the Aitareya Brahmana(AB 8.14; H.23) are not to be confused with the Kurus who survived in historical times near Delhi-Meerut. The Buddha preached several of his sermons at the settlement Kammasa-damma in Kuruland (Majjhima Nikaya 10; 75; 106) while their capital seems to have been at Thullakotthita (MN 82), the seat of the nameless petty tribal Kuru chief, presumably descended from the Pan (Java conquerors whom the epic was to inflate beyond all limits. This negligible 'kingdom' either faded away or was among the tribal groups systematically destroyed by the Magadhan emperor Mahapadma Nanda, a few years before Alexander's raid into the Punjab. The memory, however, remains as of a tribe, but not a full-fledged kingdom with a class structure in the eleventh book or the Arthashastra along with similar oligarchies like the Licchavis and the Mallas known to have been destroyed about 475 BC. As for Narayana, it might be noted here, that the famous benedictory initial stanza Narayanam namaskrtya,which would make the whole of the extant Mbh into a Vaisnava document, was stripped off by V. S. Sukthankar's text-criticism in 1933 as a late forgery.

## FOR WHAT CLASS?

We know that the Gita exercised a profound influence upon Mahatma Gandhi, B. G.Tilak, the 13th century Maharashtrian reformer Jnanesvar, the earlier Vaisnava acarya Ramanuja. and the still earlier Samkara. Though both fought hard in the cause of India's liberation from British rule, Tilak and the Mahatma certainly did not draw concordant guidance for action from the Gita. Aurobindo Ghose renounced the struggle for India's freedom to concentrate upon study of the Gita. Lokamanya Tilak knew the Jnaneswari comment, but his Gitarahasya is far from being based upon the earlier work. Jnanesvar himself did not paraphrase Samkara on the Gita, nor does his very free interpretation follow Ramanuja; tradition ascribes to him membership of the rather fantastic natha sect. Ramanuja's Vahnivism laid a secure foundation for the acrid controversy with the earlier followers of Siva who came into prominence with the great Samkara. But then, why did samkara also turn to the Bhagavad-gita?

What common need did these outstanding thinkers have that was at the same time not felt by ordinary people, even of their own class? They all belonged to the leisure-class of what, for lack of a better term, may be called Hindus. The consequent bias must not be ignored, for the great comparable poet-teachers from the common people did very well without the Gita. Kabir, the Banaras weaver, had both Muslim and Hindu followers for his plain yet profound teaching. Tukaram knew the Gita through the Jnaneswari, but worshipped Visnu in his own way by meditation upon God and contemporary society in the ancient caves (Buddhist and natural) near the junction of the Indrayam and Patina rivers. Neither Jayadeva's Gita-govinda, so musical and supremely beautiful a literary effort, (charged with the love and mystery of Krsna's cult) nor the Visnuitre reforms of Caitanya that swept the peasantry of Bengal off its feet were founded on the rock of the Gita. I have yet to hear that the heterogeneous collection which forms the Sikh canon owes anything substantial directly to the Gita, though it preserves verses due to Jayadeva, and the Maharashtrian Namdev. Jnanesvar ran foul of current brahmin belief at Alandi, and had to take refuge about 1290 AD on the south bank of the Godavari, in the domains of Ramacandra Yadava, to compose his famous gloss in the common people's language. We know as little of the historic action taken or instigated by Samkara and Ramanuja as we should have known of Tilak's

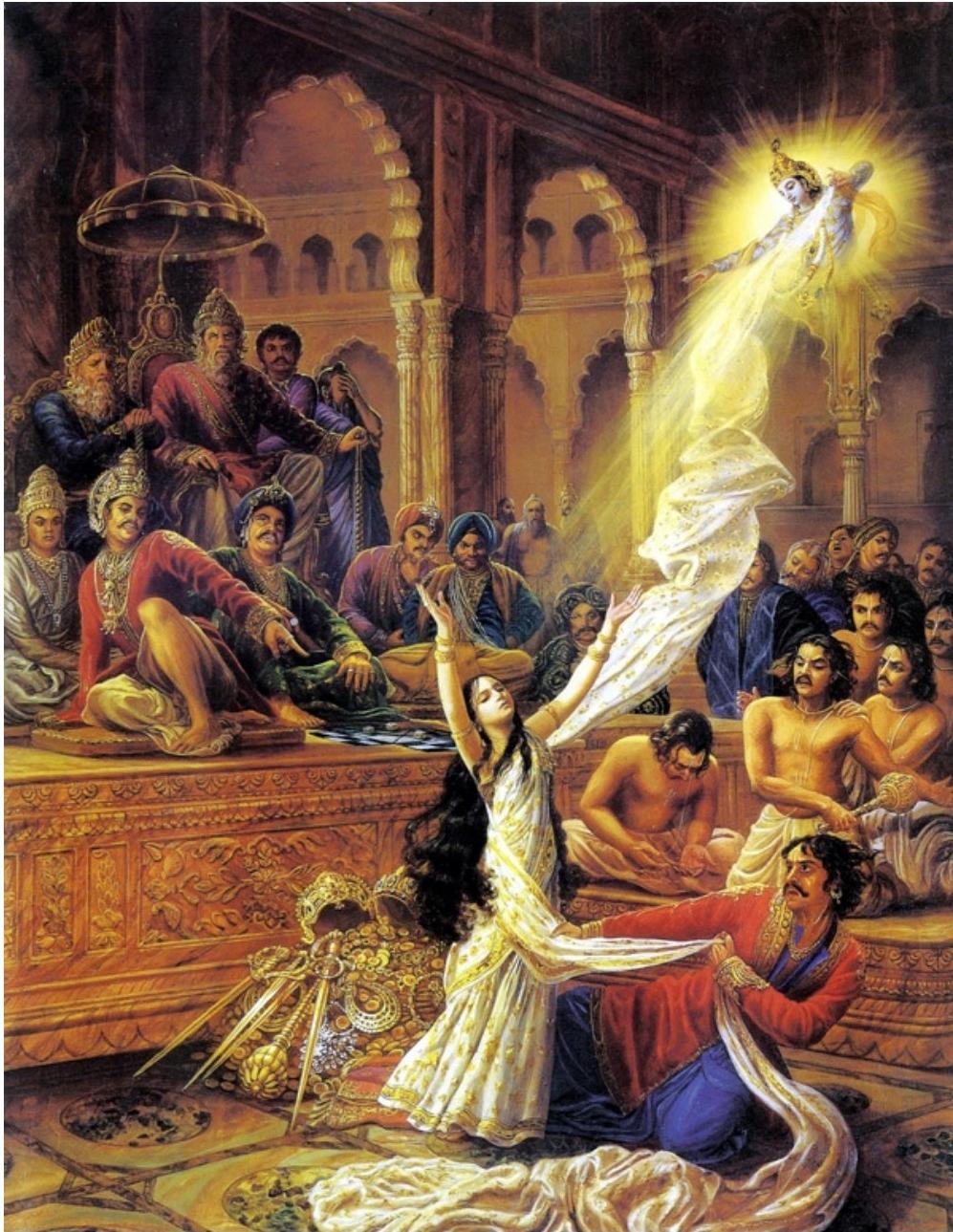


Fig. 2: Artistic rendition of a war scene from Mahabharata depicting Draupadi

had only his Gita-rahasya survived. Yet, about the year 800, Samkara was active in some manner that resulted -according to tradition in the abolition of many Buddhist monasteries. That this was achieved by his penetrating logic and sheer ability in disputation is now, the general Hindu belief. The mass of writing left in his name, and what is given therein as the Buddhist doctrine which he refutes, make only one thing clear: that he had not the remotest idea of Gotama Buddha's original teaching. Buddhism as practised in the monasteries had in any case degenerated into Lamalism with opulent vihara foundations which were a serious drain upon the economy of the country. That samkara's activity provided a stimulus to their abolition, and Ramanuja's some handle against the wealthier barons whose worship of Siva was associated in the popular mind with their oppressive land-rent, seems

a reasonable conclusion on the evidence before us. Otherwise, it would be difficult to explain why the richer, aristocratic landholders opted for Siva, the poorer, and relatively plebeian overwhelmingly for Visnu, in the bitter smartavaisnava feuds, it is difficult to believe that they could come to blows because of differing religious philosophy.. Samkara

managed to discover a higher and lower knowledge in the Upanisads which allowed him "to conform to the whole apparatus of Hindu belief "whatever that may mean"on the lower plane, while on the higher he finds no true reality in anything; his logic, it has been

well said, starts by denying the truth of the proposition 'A is either B or not B'... At death the soul when released is merged in the absolute and does not continue to be distinct from it". According to Ramanuja,

"if in a sense there is an absolute whence all is derived, the individual souls and matter still have a reality of their own, and the end of life is not merger in the absolute but continued blissful existence. This state is to be won by bhakti, faith in and devotion to God." It is not possible to imagine that subtle arguments on these tenuous ideas gripped the masses, that people could be whipped up to a frenzy merely by the concept of restricted dualism (visistadvaita) or thorough going dualism (dvaita). Yet frenzied conflict there was, for centuries. Neither side objected to rendering faithful service at the same time to beef-eating Muslim overlords, who knocked brahmins off without compunction or retribution, and desecrated temples without divine punishment.

The main conclusion is surely the following:

Practically anything can be read into the Gita by a determined person, without denying the validity of a class system. THE GITA FURNISHED THE ONE SCRIPTURAL SOURCE WHICH COULD BE USED WITHOUT VIOLENCE TO ACCEPTED BRAHMIN METHODOLOGY, TO DRAW INSPIRATION AND JUSTIFICATION FOR SOCIAL ACTIONS IN SOME WAY DISAGREEABLE TO A BRANCH OF THE RULING CLASS upon whose mercy the brahmins depended at the moment. That the action was not mere personal opportunism is obvious in each of the cases cited above It remains to show how the document achieved this unique position.

### A REMARKABLE INTERPOLATION

That the song divine is sung for the upper classes by the brahmins, and only through them for others, is clear. We hear from the mouth of Krsna himself (G.9.32): "For those who take refuge in Me, be they even of the sinful brands such as women, vaisyas, and sudras.." That is, all women and all men of the working and producing classes are defiled by their very birth, though they may in after-life be freed by their faith in the god who degrades them so casually in this one. Not only that, the god himself had created such differences (G.4.13): "The four-caste (class) division has been created by Me"; this is proclaimed in the list of great achievements. The doctrines are certainly not timeless. Ethics come into being only as they serve some social need. Food-producing society (as distinct from conflicting aggregates of food-gathering tribal groups) originated in the fairly recent and definite historical past, so that the principles upon which it may work at some given stage could not have been expressed from eternity. The Gita sets out each preceding doctrine in a masterly and sympathetic way without naming or dissecting it, and with con- summate skill passes smoothly on to another when Arjuna asks "why then do you ask me to do something so repulsive and clearly against this ?" Thus, we have a brilliant (if plagiarist) review-synthesis of many schools of thought which were in many respects mutually incompatible. The incompatibility is never brought out; all views are simply facets of the one divine mind. The best in each system is derived, naturally, as from the high God. There is none of the polemic so characteristic of disputatious Indian philosophy; only the Vedic ritual beloved of the Mimamsakas is condemned outright.

The Upanisads are well if anonymously represented,

though the Svetasvada Upanisada one contains the germ of bhakti, and none the theory of perfection through a large succession of rebirths. This function of karma is characteristically Buddhist. Without Buddhism, G.2.55-72 (recited daily as prayers at Mahatma Gandhi's asrama) would be impossible. The brahma-nirvana of G. 2.72, and 5.25 is the Buddhist ideal state of escape from the effect of karma. We may similarly trace other unlabelled schools of thought such as Samkhya and Mimamsa down to early Vedanta (G. 15.15 supported by the reference- to the Brahma-sutra in G. 13.4)-. This helps date the work as somewhere between 150-350 AD, nearer the later than the earlier date. The ideas are older, not original, except perhaps the novel use of bhakti. The language is high classical Sanskrit such as could not have been written much before the Guptas, though the metre still shows the occasional irregularity (G. 8. 101,8. IP, 15. 3a, &c) in characteristic of the Mbh as a whole. The Sanskrit of the high Gupta period, shortly after the time of the Gita, would have been more careful in verification.

It is known in any case that the Mbh and the Puranas suffered a major revision " in the period given above. The Mbh in particular was in the hands of Brahmins belonging to the Bhrgu clan, who inflated it to about its present bulk (though the process of inflation continued afterwards) before the Gupta age came to flower. The Puranas also continued to be written or rewritten to assimilate some particular cult to Brahminism. The last discernible redaction of the main Purana group refers to the Guptas still as local princes between Fyzabad and Prayag. This context fits the Gita quite well. The earliest dated mention of anything that could possibly represent the Gita is by Hsiuen Chuang, early in the seventh century, who refers to a Brahmin having forged at his king's order such a text, (supposedly of antiquity) which was then 'discovered', in order to foment war. The fact does remain that the Mbh existed in two versions at the time of the Asvadaya Grhya Sutra, which refers both to the Bharata and the Mahabharata" The prologue of the present Mbh repeats much the same information in such a way as to make it evident that the older 24,000-stote Bharata was still current at the time the longer version was promulgated. Every attempt was made to ascribe both to the great 'expander', Vyasa, to whom almost every Purana is also ascribed. A common factor is the number 18, which had some particular sanctity for the (whole complex, and for the Brahmins connected therewith. There are 18 main gotra clan-groups of brahmins though the main 751 sages are only seven in number

many of the 18, e.g. the kevala Bhiargavas and kevala Angirasas) are difficult to fit into a rational scheme. Correspondingly, there are 18 main Puranas, and 18 parvan sections of the Mbh, though the previous division was into 100, as we learn from the prologue. The very action of the Bharatan war was fought over 18 days between 18 legions. The Gita has also 18 adhyayas, which is surely not without significance. That the older Bharata epic had a shorter hut similar Gita is most unlikely. One could expect some sort of an exhortation to war, as is actually contained in- G. 2. 37: "If slain, you gain heaven; if victorious, the earth; so up, son of Kunti, and concentrate on fighting". These lines lit the occasion very well. Such pre-battle urging was customary in all lands at all times (advocated even by the supremely practical Arthashastra, 10.3) through invocations and incantations, songs of bards, proclamations by heralds, and speech of captain or king. What is highly improbable - except to the brahmin bent upon getting his interventions into a popular lay of war is this most intricate three-hour discourse on moral philosophy, after the battle-conches had blared out in mutual defiance and two vast armies had begun their inexorable movement towards collision.

To put it bluntly, the utility of the Gita derives from its peculiar fundamental defect, namely dexterity in seeming to reconcile the irreconcilable. The high god repeatedly emphasizes the great virtue of non-killing (ahimsa), yet the entire discourse is an incentive to war. So, G. 2.19 ff. says that it is impossible to kill or be killed. The soul merely puts off an old body as a man his old clothes, in exchange for new; it cannot be cut by weapons, nor suffer from fire, water or the storm. In G. 11, the terrified Arjuna sees all the warriors of both sides rush into a gigantic Visnu-Krsna's innumerable voracious mouths, to be swallowed up or crushed. The moral is pointed by the demoniac god himself (G. 11.33): that all the warriors on the field had really been destroyed by him; Arjuna's killing them would be a purely formal affair whereby he could win the opulent kingdom. Again, though the yajna sacrifice is played down or derided, it is admitted in G. 3.14 to be the generator of rain, without which food and life would be impossible. This slippery opportunism characterizes the whole book. Naturally, it is not surprising to find so many Gita lovers imbued therewith. Once it is admitted that material reality is gross illusion, the rest follows quite simply; the world of "doublethink" is the only one that matters.

The Gita was obviously a new composition, not the

expansion of some proportionately shorter religious instruction in the old version. I next propose to show that the effort did not take hold for some centuries after the composition.

## NOT SUFFICIENT UNTO THE PURPOSE

The lower classes were necessary as an audience, and the heroic lays of ancient war drew them to the recitation. This made the epic a most convenient vehicle for any doctrine which the brahmins wanted to insert; even better than rewriting the Puranas, or faking new Puranas for age-old cults. The Sanskrit language was convenient, if kept simple, because the Prakrits were breaking apart into far too many regional languages; Sanskrit was also the language which the upper classes had begun to utilize more and more. Kusana and Satavahana inscriptions are in the popular lingua franca used by monk and trader. But from 150 AD, there appears a new type of chief (oftener than not of foreign origin like Rudradaman) who brags in ornate Sanskrit of his achievements, including knowledge of Sanskrit. The Buddhists had begun to ignore the Teacher's injunction to use the common people's languages; they too adopted Sanskrit. The high period of classical Sanskrit literature really begins with their religious passion-plays and poems, such as those written by Asvaghosa." A patrician class favouring Sanskrit as well as the Sanskrit-knowing priestly class was in existence.

No one could object to the interpolation of a story (akhyanas) or episode. After all, the Mbh purports to be the recitation in the Naimisa forest to the assembled sages and ascetics by a bard Ugrasravas, who repeated what Vyasa had sung to Janamejaya as having been reported by Sanjaya to Dhrtarastra! The brahmins were dissatisfied with the profit derived from the Gita, not with its authenticity. So, we have the Anu-Gita as a prominent sequel in the 14th Canto (Asvamedha-parvan). Arjuna confesses that he has forgotten all the line things told before the battle, and prays for another lesson. Krsna replies that it would be impossible even for him to dredge it out of his memory once again; the great effort was not to be duplicated. However, an incredibly shoddy second Gita is offered instead which simply extols brahminism and the brahmin. Clearly, that was felt necessary at the time by the inflators though no one reads it now, and it cannot be compared to the first Gita even for a moment.

Secondly, the Gita as it stands could not possibly help any ksatriya in an imminent struggle, if indeed

he could take his mind off the battle long enough to understand even a fraction thereof. The ostensible moral is: "Kill your brother, if duty calls, without passion; as long as you have faith in Me, all sins are forgiven." Now the history of India always shows not only brothers but even father and son fighting to the death over the throne, without the slightest hesitation or need for divine guidance. Indra took his own father by the foot and smashed him (RV 4. 18. 12), a feat which the brahmin Vamadeva applauds. Ajatasatru, king of Magadha, imprisoned his father Bimbisara to usurp the throne, and then had the old man killed in prison. Yet, even the Buddhists- and Jains as well as Brhadimyaka Upanisad(2.1) praise the son (who was the founder of India's first great empire) as a wise and able king. The Arthashastra(A. 1.17-18) devotes a chapter to precautions against such ambitious heirs-apparent; and shows in the next how the heir apparent could circumvent them if he were in a hurry to wear the crown. Krsna himself at Kurukshetra had simply to point to the Yadava contingent, his own people, who were fighting in the opposite ranks. The legend tells us that all the Yadavas ultimately perished fighting among themselves. Earlier, Krsna had killed his maternal uncle Kamsa. The tale gains a new and peculiar force if it -be remembered that under mother-right, the new chief must always be the sister's son of the old.

Thirdly, Krsna as he appears in the Mbh is singularly ill-suited to propound any really moral doctrine. The most venerable character of the epic, Bhisma, takes up the greatest of Mbh parvans (Santi) with preaching morality on three important questions : King-craft (raja-dharma), conduct in distress (apad-dharma), and emancipation (moksha-dharma}. As regent, he had administered the kingdom to which he had freely surrendered his own right. He had shown irresistible prowess and incomparable knightly honour throughout a long life of unquestioned integrity. The sole reproach anyone can make is that he uses far too many words for a man shot full of arrows, dying like a hedgehog on a support of its own quills. Still, Bhisma seems eminently fitted to teach rectitude. But Krsna? At every single crisis of the war, his advice wins the day by the crookedest of means which could never have occurred to the others. To kill Bhisma, Sikhandin was used as a living shield against whom that perfect knight would not raise a weapon, because of doubtful sex. Drona was polished off while stunned by the deliberate false report of his son's death. Karna was shot down against all rules of chivalry when dismounted and unarmed; Duryodhana was bludgeoned to death after a foul mace blow that shattered his thigh. This

is by no means the complete list of iniquities. When taxed with these transgressions, Krsna replies bluntly at the end of the Satya-parvanthat the man could not have been killed in any other way, that victory could never have been won otherwise. The calculated treachery of the Arthashastra saturates the actions of this divine exponent of the Bhagavad-gita. It is perhaps in the same spirit that leading modern exponents of the Gita and of ahimsa like Rajaji have declared openly that non-violence is all very well as a method of gaining power, but to be scrapped when power has been captured : "When in the driver's seat, one must use the whip."

#### WHY KRSNA?

Just as the Mbh could be used as a basis only because people came to hear the war story recited, Krsna could have been of importance only if his cult were rising in popularity, yet sufficiently unformed for such barefaced remoulding. The cult, however, is clearly synthetic. The identification with Narayana is a syncretism, taking originally distinct cults as one. In the same direction is the assimilation of many sagas to a single Krsna legend, whether or not the original hero bore the epithet of Krsna, There would, however, be no question of creating a new cult out of whole cloth; some worship or set of similar worships must already have been in existence among the common people before any brahmins could be attracted thereto. The best such recent example is that of Satyanarayana, "the true Narayana", so popular all over the country, but which has no foundation whatever in scripture, and which is not even mentioned 200 years ago. Indeed, the origin seems to be in the popular legends of one Satya Pir, in Bengal; the Pir himself became Satyanarayana.

The vedas have a Visnu, but no Narayana. The etymology seems to be he who sleeps upon the flowing waters (nara) and this is taken as the steady state of Naifiyaija. It precisely describes the Mesopotamian Ea or Enki, who sleeps in his chamber in the midst of the waters, as Sumerian myth and many a Sumerian seal, tell us. The word nara (plural) for 'the waters' is not Indo-Aryan. Both the word and the god might conceivably go back to the Indus Valley. The later appearance in Sanskrit only means that the peaceful assimilation of the people who transmitted the legend was late. At any rate, the flood-and-creation myth (so natural in a Monsoon country) connects the first three avatars, Fish, Tortoise and Boar surely related to primitive totemic worships. The Fish has its Mesopotamia counterparts.



Fig. 3: Artistic rendition of a scene from Mahabharata depicting Arjun and Krishna

One performance of this Narayana is shared by Krsna in the did : the visva-rupa-darsana showing that the god contains the whole universe; he individually represents the best specimen of each species in it. Though familiar to most of us as in Gita 10-11, there is a prototype version without Krsna in Mbh 3.186.39- 112, which shows that an all-pervading Narayana had been invented much earlier.

The speech-goddess Vag-ambhrni, in a famous but late hymn of the Rgveda (RV. 10. 125), declares that she draws Rudra's bow, and is herself Soma and the substance of all that is best. The original god whose misdeeds are never sin is surely the upanisadic Indra who says to Pratardana Daivodasi : "Know thou Me alone; this indeed do I deem man's supreme good that he should know Me. I slew the three- headed Tvastra, threw the Arurmaghā ascetics to the wolves, and transgressing many a treaty, I pierced through and through the Prahladlyans in the heavens, the Paulomas in the upper air, and the Kalakanjas on this earth. - Yet such was I then that I never turned a hair. So, he who understands Me, his world is not injured by any deed whatever of his : not by his killing his own mother, by killing his own father, by robbery, killing an embryo, or the commission of any sin whatever does his complexion fade" (Kaus .Brah. Up. 3.2). The 'breaking many a treaty' is again the Arthashastra king's normal practice, though that book mentions that in olden days even a treaty concluded by simple word of mouth was sacred (A. 7. 17). Indra performed all these dismal feats in vedic tradition,

but that tradition nowhere makes him proclaim himself as the supreme object for bhakti; papaand bhakti are not vedic concepts. No vedic god can bestow plenary absolution as in G.18.66 : "Having cast off all (other) beliefs, rites and observances, yield to Me alone ; I shall deliver you from all sins, never fear". The reason Krsna could do this and not Indra was that the older god was dearly circumscribed by immutable vedic suktas and tied to the vedic yajna fire- ritual. He was the model of the barbarous Aryan war-leader who could get drunk with his followers and lead them to victory in the fight. His lustre had been sadly tarnished by intervening Buddhism, which had flatly denied yajna and brought in a whole new conception of morality and social justice. The pastoral form of bronze- age society with which Indra was indissolubly connected had gone out of productive existence.

Krsna or rather one of the many Krsnas also represented this antagonism. The legend of his enmity to Indra reflects in the Rgveda the historical struggle of the dark pre-Aryans against the marauding Aryans. The black skin-colour was not an insurmountable obstacle, for we find a Krsna Angirasa as a vedic seer. The Yadus are a vedic tribe too, but no Krsna seems associated with them though the 'bound Yadu' prisoner of war is mentioned. There was a 'Krsna the son of Devaki' towhom Ghora Angirasa imparted some moral discipline, accenting to Chandogya Up .3. 17. 1-7. The Mahanubhavas

take Samdipani as Krsna's guru, and a few include the irascible Durvasa in the list of his teachers. Krsna the athletic Kamsa-killer could beat anyone in the arena, whether or not he was the same Krsna who trampled down Kaliya, the many-headed Naga snake-demon that infested the Yamuna river at Mathura. Naturally the Greeks who saw his cult in India at the time of Alexander's invasion identified Krsna with their own Herakles.

### Krsna's Marriage and Death

One feature of the Krsna myth, which still puzzles Indians, would have been quite familiar to the Greeks. The incarnate god was killed unique in all Indian tradition by an arrow shot into his heel, as were Achilles and other Bronze-age heroes. Moreover, the archer Jaras is given in most accounts as Krsna's half-brother, obviously the saint of the sacred king who had to kill the senior twin. Krsna himself consoles the repentant killer, and absolves him by saying that his own time had come; the sacred king's appointed term had ended. One might venture the guess that the original unpardonable sin committed by Indra and perhaps by Krsna as well was the violation of matriarchal custom, unthinkable in the older society, but which they managed to survive triumphantly, and in comparison to which all other sins paled into insignificance. Certainly, the gokula in which Krsna was brought up would be patriarchal, as a cattle-herders' commune. But the Vrndavana where he played his pranks was sacred to a mother-goddess, the goddess of a group (vrnda) symbolized by the Tulasi (Basil) plant. Krsna had to many that goddess, and is still married to her every year, though she does not appear in the normal list of his wives; originally, this meant a *hieros* games with the priestess who represented them and the annual sacrifice of the male consort. Inasmuch as there is no myth of Krsna's annual sacrifice, but only of his having substituted for the husband, he seems to have broken the primitive usage, as did Herakles and Theseus.

The taming of the Naga has perhaps a deeper significance than Herakles decapitating the Hydra, a feat still earlier portrayed in the Mesopotamian glyptic. The Naga was the patron deity, perhaps aboriginal cult-object of the place. The trampling down of Kaliya instead of killing indicates the obvious survival of Naga worship, and parallels the action of Mahisasura~mardini. Such cults survive to this day, as for example that of Mani-naga, which has come down through the centuries near Orissa. Nilamata-naga, for whom the brahmins wrote a

special purana, was the primitive deity of Kasmlr. The Naga Srikantha had to be faced in a dud by Pusyabhuti, king of Thanesar. Such local guardian nagas are current down to the 10th century work Navasahasanka-carita. So, our hero had a considerable following among the Indian people, even in the 4th century BC. By the later Sunga period, he was called Bhagavat, originally the Buddha's title. A Greek ambassador Heliodorus proclaims himself convert to the cult, on the pillar near Bhilsa. That Krsna had risen from the preAryan people is clean from a Paninian reference 4.3.98, explained away by the commentator Patanjali) to the effect that neither nor Arjuna counted as ksatriyas. But his antiquity is considerable, for he is the one god who uses the sharp wheel, the missile discus, as his peculiar weapon. This particular weapon is not known to the Vedas and went out of fashion well before the time of the Buddha. Its historicity is attested only by cave paintings! in Mirzapur which show raiding horse-charioteers (clearly enemies of the aboriginal stone-age artists) one of whom is about to hurl such a wheel. The event and the painting may fairly be put at about 800 BC by which date the dark god was on the side of the angels, no longer an aborigine himself.

A historical tribe of Vrsnis is actually known about the 2nd century AD by a single coin in the British Museum found near Hoshiarpur in the Punjab. When Krsna's people were driven out of Mathura by fear of Jarasamda (Mbh. 2.13.47-49 and 2.13.65), they retreated WESTWARDS to found a new mountain-locked city of Dvaraka, which is, therefore, more likely to have been near modern Darwaz in Afghanistan rather than the Kathiawad seaport. When the Buddhist Mahamayuri mantra (circa 3rd century AD) speaks of Visnu as the guardian yaksa of Dvaraka, however (Sylvain Levi, Journal Asiatique 1915.19-138; line 13 of Sanskrit text), presumably the latter city was meant; it is notable that Visnu and not Krsna is named. As for the Deccan Yadavas, the brahmins who found a genealogy which connected them to the dark god had no deeper aim in the forgery than to raise the chiefs of a local clan above the surrounding population.

Finally, there was also the useful messianic aspect as in G. 4.7. The many proto-historic Krsnas and current belief in transmigration made the avatar a syncretism possible. It could also lead the devotee in his misery to hope for a new avatara to deliver him from oppression in this world, as he hoped for salvation in the next.



Fig. 4: Pantheon of Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Like the avatars of Visnu-Narayana, the various Krsnas gathered many different worships into one without doing violence to any, without smashing or antagonizing any. Krsna the mischievous and beloved shepherd lad is not incompatible with Krsna the extraordinarily virile husband of many women. His 'wives' were originally local mother goddesses, each in her own right. The 'husband' eased the transition from mother-right to patriarchal life, and allowed the original cults to be practised on a subordinate level.

This is even better seen in the marriage of Siva and Parvati which was supplemented by the Ardhanarisvara hermaphrodite [half Siva, half Parvati, just to prevail any separation]. Mahisasura (Mhasoba), the demon "killed" by that once independent goddess, is still occasionally worshipped near her temple (as at the foot of Parvati hill in Poona). Sometimes, (as at Vir) he is found married to a goddess (Jogubai) now equated to Durga while another goddess (Tukai) similarly identified is shown crushing the buffalo demon on the adjacent hillock. The widespread Naga cult was absorbed by putting the cobra about Siva's neck, using him as the canopied bed on which Narayana floats in perpetual sleep upon the waters, and putting him also in the hand of Ganesa. The bull Nandi was worshipped by stone-age people long before Siva had been invented to ride on his back. The list can be extended by reference to our complex iconography, and study of the divine households. Ganesa's animal bead and

human body equate him to the 'sorcerers' and diablotins painted by ice-age men in European caves.

This is "in the Indian character", and we have remarked that a similar attitude is reflected in the philosophy of the Gita. No violence is done to any preceding doctrine except vedic yajna. The essential is taken from each by a remarkably keen mind capable of deep and sympathetic study; all are fitted together with consummate dull and literary ability, and cemented by bhakti without developing their contradictions. The thing to mark is that the Indian character was not always so tolerant. There are periods when people came to blows over doctrine, ritual, and worship. Emperor Harsa Siladitya (circa 600-640 AD) of Kanauj found no difficulty in worshipping Gauri, Mahesvara-Siva, and the Sun, while at the same time he gave the fullest devotion to Buddhism.<sup>23</sup> His enemy Narendragupta-Sasanka, raided Magadha from Bengal, cut down the Bodhi tree at Gaya, and wrecked Buddhist foundations wherever he could. What was the difference? Why was a synthesis of the two religions, actually practised by others besides Harsa (as literary references can show) not successful? Let me put it that the underlying difficulties were economic. Images locked up too much useful metal; monasteries and temples after the Gupta age withdrew far too much from circulation without replacement or compensation by adding to or

stimulating production in any way. Thus, the most thorough going iconoclast in Indian history was another king Harsa (1089 - 1101 AD) who broke up all images in Kasmir, except four that were spared. This was done systematically under a special minister devotpantanayaka, without adducing the least theological excuse, though one could easily have been found. The Kasmirian king remained a man of culture, a patron of Sanskrit literature and the arts; he presumably read the Gita too. But he needed funds for his desperate fight against the Damara group of local barons. The particular campaign was won, at the cost of making feudalism stronger than ever. The conclusion to be drawn is that a dovetailing of the superstructure will be possible only when the underlying differences are not too great. Thus, the Gita was a logical performance for the early Gupta period, when expanding village settlement brought in new wealth to a powerful central government. Trade was again on the increase, and many sects could obtain economic support in plenty. The situation had changed entirely by the time of Harsa Siladitya, though many generous donations to monasteries were still made.

The villages had to be more or less self-contained and self-supporting. Tax-collection by a highly centralized but non-trading state was no longer a paying proposition, because commodity production per head and cash trade were low; this is fully attested by the miserable coinage. The valuable, concentrated luxury trade of the Kusana-Satavahana era had suffered relative decline in spite of feudal and monastic accumulation of gold, silver, jewels, etc. Once magnificent cities like Patna, no longer necessary for production, had dwindled to villages containing ruins which people could regard only as the work of superhuman beings. There was no longer enough for all; one or the other group had to be driven to the wall. One such instance is the combined Hari-Hara cult [with an image half Siva, half Visnu which had its brief day but could not remain in fashion much beyond the 11th century. The followers of Hari and Hara found their interests too widely separated, and we have the smarta-vaisnava struggle instead. With Mughal prosperity at its height, Akbar could dream of a synthetic Din-e-ilahi; Aurangzeb could only try to augment his falling revenue by increased religious persecution and the Jizya tax on unbelievers.

To sum up, writing the Gita was possible only in a period when it was not absolutely necessary. Samkara could not do without the intense polemic of theological controversy. To treat all views tolerantly

and to merge them into one implies that the crisis in the means of production is not too acute. FUSION AND TOLERANCE BECOME IMPOSSIBLE WHEN THE CRISIS DEEPENS, WHEN THERE IS NOT ENOUGH OF THE SURPLUS PRODUCT TO GO AROUND, AND THE SYNTHETIC METHOD DOES NOT LEAD TO INCREASED PRODUCTION. Marrying the gods to goddesses had worked earlier because the conjoint society produced much more after differences between matriarchal and patriarchal forms of property were thus reconciled. The primitive deities adopted into Siva's or Visnu's household helped enlist food-gathering aborigines into a much greater food-producing society. The alternative would have been extermination or enslavement, each of which entailed violence with excessive strain upon contemporary production. The vedic Aryans who tried naked force had ultimately to recombine with the autochthonous people. The Gita might help reconcile certain factions of the ruling class. Its inner contradictions could stimulate some exceptional reformer to make the upper classes admit a new reality by recruiting new, members. But it could not possibly bring about any fundamental change in the means of production, nor could its fundamental lack of contact with reality and disdain for logical consistency promote a rational approach to the basic problems of Indian society

## THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF BHAKTI

However, the Gita did contain one innovation which precisely fitted the needs of a later period : bhakti, personal devotion. To whoever composed that document, bhakti was the justification, the one way of deriving all views from a single divine source. As we have seen from the demand for the quite insipid Anu-Gitasequel, this did not suffice in its own day. But with the end of the great centralized personal empires in sight Haifa's being the last the new state had to be feudal from top to bottom. The essence of fully developed feudalism is the chain of personal loyalty which binds retainer to chief, tenant to lord, and baron to king or emperor. Not loyalty in the abstract but with a secure foundation in the means and relations of production : land ownership, military service, tax-collection and the conversion of local produce into commodities through the magnates. This system was certainly not possible before the end of the 6th century AD. The key word is samanta which till 532 at last meant 'neighbouring ruler' and by 592 AD had come to mean feudal baron. The new barons were personally responsible to the

king, and part of a tax gathering mechanism. The Manusmrti king, for example, had no samantas; he had to administer everything himself, directly or through agents without independent status. The further development of feudalism 'from below' meant a class of people at the village level who had special rights over the land (whether of cultivation, occupation, or hereditary ownership) and performed special armed service as well as service in tax-collection. To hold this type of society and its state together, the best religion is one which emphasizes the role of bhakti, personal faith, even though the object of devotion may have clearly visible flaws.

Innumerable medieval rustic 'hero' stones commemorate the death in battle usually a local cattle-raid of an individual whose status was above that of the ordinary villager. In older days, the duty of protecting the disarmed villages would have been performed by the gulma garrisoning the locality. The right to bear arms (with the concomitant obligation to answer a call to arms) was now distributed among a select class of persons scattered through the villages. Many inscriptions vaunt the Ganga barons' sacrifice of their own heads in front of some idol, to confer benefit upon their king. More than one epigraph declares the local warrior's firm intention not to survive his chief. Marco Polo reported of the 13th century Pandyas that the seigneurs actually cast themselves upon the king's funeral pyre, to be consumed with the royal corpse. This suits the bhakti temperament very well. Though barbarous, it is not the type of loyalty that a savage tribal chief could expect or receive from his followers, unless his tribe were in some abnormal situation.

Though bhakti was the basic need in feudal ideology, its fruits were not enjoyed equally by all. By the 12th century, feudal taxation had begun to weigh heavily upon the peasantry, who paid not only for the luxurious palace but also its counterpart the equally rich and even more ornate temple. Brahminism had definitely come to the top, as may be seen from two monumental collections of the period, namely the Krtyakalpataru of Bhatta Laksmidhara (minister of Govindacandra Gahanjavala of Kanauj, circa 1150 AD); and a century later, Hemadri's quite similar Caturvargadntanumi. The latter was chancellor of the exchequer (maha-karand-dhipa) under the last Yadavas of Devagiri (Daulatabad). He is described as the outstanding computer (ganakagrani). A few tables for quick assessment survive in Hemadri's name; the name is also (wrongly) coupled in Marathi tradition with the general use of bajrias cultivated food-grain, the cursive Modi alphabet, and the

numerous close-jointed mortar less Yadava temples that had been built centuries earlier, to develop from little shrines of matchless proportion and balance into rank, clumsy, richly endowed structures by the 12th century. Yet his magnum opus, far from being another Arthashastra, or an 'Ain-i-Akbari, or an Indian Corpus Juris Civilis, is concerned almost entirely with brahminical rites and ritual codified from Puranas and other accepted religious books. The published seven volumes contain perhaps three fifths of the original. Any person who performed even a tenth of the special rites prescribed for any given deity, lunar date, transgression, celebration, worship, festival or occasion would have no time for anything else; as a document of a superstitious leisure class, none other known today will bear comparison with it. A section on jurisprudence preserved in Laksmidhara's compendium shows that common law was practised and decisions for each caste, tribe, and locality based upon their particular custom; but the work repeats smrti doctrine without mention of the innovations in practice, or discussion of a single case.

The protest was expressed in Maharashtra by two different groups, both oriented towards Krsna worship and remarkably enough supported by primitive survivals. The Mahanubhava or Manbhav sect was founded by Cakradhara in the 12th century, and went back to the ideals of tribal, communal life. Black garments, absolute rejection of the caste system, organization into clan-like sub-groups, sharing among members, and a greatly simplified marriage ritual (gada-bada-gunda) prove this, though a few leaders of the sect later accumulated some property, with a concomitant thirst for Hindu respectability. The other movement, crystallized by Jnanesvar was particularly strong among the seasonal varkari pilgrims to Pandharpur, who followed a custom which seems to date back to the mesolithic age. Jnanesvar was under brahmin interdict, as begotten by an apostate monk; his aged parents drowned themselves in the Ganges while he himself committed ritual suicide at Alandi, after a short but exceptionally bitter life. The Maratha saints who followed him all wrote like him in the vernacular, had personally experienced the hardships of the common people, and came from all castes. Namdev, though a tailor, carried the new doctrine to the far north, with success. I am told that some of his work was absorbed directly into the Sikh Canon (Granth Saheb), or provided stimulus and inspiration even at so great a distance to what became a great religious movement among the common people of the Punjab. Gora was a potter by

caste and craft The untouchable Cokha Mela was killed by collapse of Mangalvedhe town wall for the construction of which he had been pressed by corvee, old as he was. The Paithan brahmin Eknath, to whom we owe the present text of the Jnanesvari (in 1590 AD) as well as many fine Marathi poems, went out of his way to break the crudest restrictions of untouchability. The greatest of them all, the 16th century kunabi peasant and petty grain-dealer Tukaram survived grim famine, the unremitting jealousy of contemporary folk-poets, and the contemptuous hatred of brahmins, ultimately to drown himself in the river. These men represent a general movement by no mean confined to their province and language. The generally painful tenor of their lives shows that they were in the opposition, and did not care to exercise the meretricious art of pleasing those in power quite unlike the brahmins, who did not scorn to develop the cult of these saints whenever it paid, but always pandered to the rich. The real military strength of the Marathas, as later of the Sikhs, derived obviously from the simpler, less caste-ridden, and less unequal life. The later Maratha generals like the Sinde and Gaekwad rose from relatively obscure families, unlike the earlier and more distinguished Candrarao More, Bhonsle, and Jadhav, the last of whom might claim kinship with the Yadava emperors of Devagiri and through them perhaps with Krsna himself. Malharrao Holkar was of the Dhangar shepherd caste, and would normally not have been allowed to rise to the status of a general, duke, and eventually king. It seems to me that some of this goes back, like the bhagya jhenda flag of Maratha armies, to Varkari

custom. In spite of the brahmin Badave priests, and the rampant brahminism of the Peshwa days, the Varkari pilgrims minimized caste observances and distinctions on the journey. However, the reform and its struggle was never consciously directed against feudalism, so that its very success meant feudal patronage and ultimately feudal decay by diversion of a democratic movement into the dismal channels of conquest and rapine.

The conglomerate Gita philosophy might provide a loophole for innovation, but never the analytical tools necessary to make a way out of the social impasse. Jnanesvar's life and tragic career illustrate this in full measure. He does not give a literal translation of the divine message, but its meaning and essence in his own terms, and in words that any Maratha peasant could understand, Jnanesvar's longest comment on the original comes; in the 13th adhyaya of the Gita, the chapter on 'the field and field-knower', particularly on G. 13. 7 (where he

himself apologizes in J. 13. 314-338 for having been carried away far from the original) and on G. 13. 11. In the former, (J. 13.218-224), he flays the rainmaking yajnika fire-sacrificers; yet in J. 3. 134-5, these very sacrifices were taken as normal and necessary by him as by his divine exemplar; and once again (G. 18.5; J. 18. 149-152) both warn us that the yajna must not be abandoned any more than charity (dana) or ascetic practices (tapas). The suffocating contradictions of mixed superstition are neatly brought out in J. 13. 812-822: "The peasant farmer sets up cult after cult, according to convenience. He follows the preacher who seems most impressive at the moment, learns his mystic formula. Harsh to the living, he relies heavily on stones and images; but even then never lives true to any one of them. He will have My (=Krsna's) image made, established in a corner of the house, and then go off on pilgrimages to some god or other. He will pray to Me daily, but also worship the family's tutelary deity at need, and other gods as well, each at the particular auspicious moment. He finds My cult, but makes vows to others; on anniversary days, he is devoted to the ancestral Manes. The worship he gives Us on the eleventh (lunar date) is no more than that he renders! to the sacred cobras on the fifth. He is devotee solely of Ganesa on the (annual) fourth; on the fourteenth, says her 'Mother Durga, I am yours alone' ... At the Nine Nights (of the Mother-goddesses) he will recite the set praise of Candi, serve meals outdoors on the Sunday, and rush off on Monday with a bet fruit offering to Siva's phallic symbol. Thus he prays unremittingly, never still for a moment; like a prostitute at the town gate". In Jnanesvar's society, however, such eclectic worship was the universal practice at all levels, to the very highest people for whom Laksmidhara and Hemadri indited their monstrous compendia. To that extent, though indirectly, the commentator voices a protest against the growth of an oppressive upper class. The dtd doctrine is given a remarkably attractive turn by Jnanesvar's quite original interpretation (J. 9. 460-470)-: "Ksatriya, vaisya, woman, sudra and untouchable retain their separate existence only so long as they have not attained Me.. Just as rivers have their individual names, whether coming from east or west, only till they merge into the ocean. Whatever be the reason for which one's mind enters into Me, he then becomes Me, even as the iron that strikes to break the philosopher's stone turns into gold at the contact. So, by carnal love like the milkmaids, Kamsa in fear, Sisupala by undying hatred, Vasudeva- and the Yadavas by kinship, or Narada, Dhruva, Akrura, Suka and Sanatkumara through devotion they all attained Me. I am the final

resting place, whether they come to Me by the right or the wrong path, bhakti, lust or the purest love, or in enmity". Neither the callous C. 9.32 on which this charming comment is made, nor the fundamentally brutal Kreoa saga manifest such a calm elevation above jealous, exclusive bhakti. Yet, on the very next stanza, the scholiast extols brahmins as veritable gods on earth! His rejection by contemporary brahmins, which must surely have been a main reason for the decision to render the Gita into Marathi, never prevented him from striving after the brahmin vedic lore officially denied to all but initiates. That is, he embodied the inner contradictions which he discerned in contemporary society but failed to discover in the Gita. Therefore, he could launch no movement towards their solution. Though an adept in yoga as a path towards physical immortality and mystical perfection (cf. J. on G. 6. 13-15), there was nothing left for him except suicide. That the gods remained silent at the unexpected Muslim blow which devastated their many richly endowed temples and no incarnation of Krsna turned up to save the Yadava kingdom, might have been another cause for despair.

## THE GITA TODAY

The main social problem - was violently placed upon a new footing by Alauddin Khilji and the Muslim conquest which imposed payment of heavy tribute. This intensified the need for more effective tax collection; that in turn encouraged a new, powerful but more efficient feudalism. Some optimists have maintained that the poorer classes benefitted because Alauddin squeezed only the rich, who were rendered powerless. This disingenuous view carefully neglects to mention that even in the Drabs (which were directly administered) none of the former burdens of the peasantry were lifted. Their dues were collected by a different agency, though it remains true that the Hindu upper classes were prevented for a while from imposing fresh exactions. The provinces had not even this consolation, for the throne of Delhi exacted harsh tribute from conquered areas, without troubling itself about how provincial magnates gathered it and how much more besides. Local military power was reduced only to a stage where it constituted little danger to the imperial forces, but the (mechanism of violence more than sufficed for its main purpose, revenue collection. Whether the tribute was actually paid or not, and even over regions not subject to tribute), the imposts and exactions grew steadily. The class that collected the surplus retained an increasing portion, so that the needs of the state could be satisfied only in

the earlier period, when feudalism stimulated trade and fresh agrarian production. Then the crisis was aggravated, to be resolved by another foreign conquest that introduced a totally different form of production, the bourgeois-capitalist. The modern independence movement did not challenge the productive form; it only asked that the newly developed Indian bourgeoisie be in power.

Modern life is founded upon science and freedom. That is, modern production- rests in the final analysis upon accurate cognition of material reality (science), and recognition of necessity (freedom). A myth may grip us by its imagery, and may indeed have portrayed some natural phenomenon or process at a time when man- kind had not learned to probe nature's secrets or to discover the endless properties of matter. Religion clothes some myth in dogma. "Science needs religion" is a poor way of saying that the scientists and those who utilize his discoveries must not dispense with social ethics. There is no need to dig into the Gita or the Bible for an ethical system sandwiched with pure superstition. Such books can still be enjoyed for their aesthetic value. Those who claim more usually try to shackle the minds of other people, and to impede man's progress, under the most specious claims.

Individual human perfection on the spiritual plane becomes much easier when every individual's material needs are first satisfied on a scale agreed upon as reasonable by the society of his day. That is, the main root of evil is social. The fundamental causes of social evil are no longer concealed from human sight. Their cure does not lie in theology but in socialism; the application of modern science, based upon logical deduction from planned experiment, to the structure of society itself. Science is at the basis of modern production; and no other tools of production are insight for the satisfaction of man's needs. Moreover, the material needs could certainly be satisfied for all, if the relations of production did not hinder it.

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## The Invention and Persistence of a Legend: The Anarkali story

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-Prof. Shireen Moosvi

William Finch came to India along with Hawkins in 1608 and was in Lahore from 4 February 1611 to at least 18 August of the same year. In the course of a fairly detailed description of the edifices at Lahore, he writes:

Passing the Sugar Gonge is a Faire Meskite built by Shecke Fereed; beyond it (without the Towne, in the way to the Gardens) is a faire monument for Don Sha his mother, one of the Acabar his wives, with whom it is said Shah Selim had to do ( her name was Immacque Kelle, or Pomegranate kernel) upon notice of which the king caused her to be inclosed quicke within a wall in his Moholl, where she died: and the [present] King in token of his love, commands a sumptuous Tombe to be built of stone in the midst of a four-square Garden richly walled, with a gate, and diverse rooms over it: the convexity of the Tombe he hath willed to be wrought in workes of gold, with a large faire Jounter with roomes over-head.<sup>1</sup>

This is the first recounting of the Anarkali story, and is particularly noteworthy since it was written within barely 15 years of the alleged event. It can be argued that it belongs to the realm of direct living memory. The only other early mention, though different from that of Finch, occurs in the record left by Edward Terry, sometime between 1616 and 1619, that is within a decade of Finch's narration of the story. Terry tell us:

... Achabar-sha had threatened to disherit the present king, for abuse of Anar-kalee (that is pomegranate kernel) his most beloved wife; but on his death-bed repealed it.<sup>2</sup>

Here, the charge against Salim is a little different, and since Terry never visited Lahore, there is no mention of the construction of the tomb.

The tomb mentioned by Finch, actually exists, and is still popularly believed to be that of Anarkali. It has

inscriptions carved on the sarcophagus of pure marble containing, in addition to 99 names of God, the following couplet:

*Ta qayamat shukr goyam kardgar-i-khwesh ra  
Ah! Gar man baz binam ru-i-yar-i khwesh ra*

'I will go rendering thanks to my Lord until the day of resurrection;  
Oh! If I could see the face of my beloved once again.'  
On the sides of the sarcophagus, the following words are engraved: *Majnun, Salim-i Akbar* (the Devoted Lover, Salim son of Akbar)

The passionate language of the inscriptions lends some credence to the story narrated by Finch. The inscriptions on the tomb also gives two dates, viz. AH 1008 (AD 1599) and AH 1024 (1615)<sup>3</sup>. It has been suggested that the first date is that of the person buried and the second of the building of the tomb<sup>4</sup>. Since Finch had seen and described the tomb in 1611, the other date of 1615 should rather be that of the completion of the tomb.

However, Finch's story raises many difficulties: first, Danyal's mother died in AH 1005(AD 1596)<sup>5</sup> not in AH 1008(AD 1599); second, Salim(Jahangir), being born on 9 September 1569<sup>6</sup>, was only three years older than Danyal who was born on 18 September 1571<sup>7</sup>. This implies that Danyal's mother was at least 15 years older to Salim, an affair between 29 years old Salim and 44 years old Anarkali in 1596 seems hardly credible<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, Akbar was not at Lahore in 1599, when the one lying buried in the tomb is supposed to have died.<sup>9</sup>

The mention of Danyal's mother by Finch, however, gives us a possible clue to what actually gave rise to the story told by him. In 1596, Prince Salim is

<sup>1</sup> Purchas, *Purchas His Pilgrims*, Vol. IV, Glassgow, 1907, p. 57. See also Foster, *Early Travels in India(1583-1619)*,ed. W.Foster, London, 1927, p.166. For dates of Finch's stay at Lahore see Foster's note, *Early Travels in India*, p.123.

<sup>2</sup> Foster, *Early Travels in India*, p. 330

<sup>3</sup> For these inscriptions, see Syed Muhammad Latif, *Lahore: Its History, Architectural Remains and Antiquities*, Lahore, 1882, pp. 186-87.

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Baqir, *Lahore: Past and Present*, 1952, Indian reprint, Delhi, 1993, pp.428-33

<sup>5</sup> Abu'l Fazl, *Akbarnama*, Vol. III, ed. Ahmad Ali, Calcutta, 1873, p.713.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,Vol II,p. 349

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 372

<sup>8</sup> This is also pointed out by Baqir, op. cit., p.431

<sup>9</sup> *Akbarnama*, Vol. III, p.749.

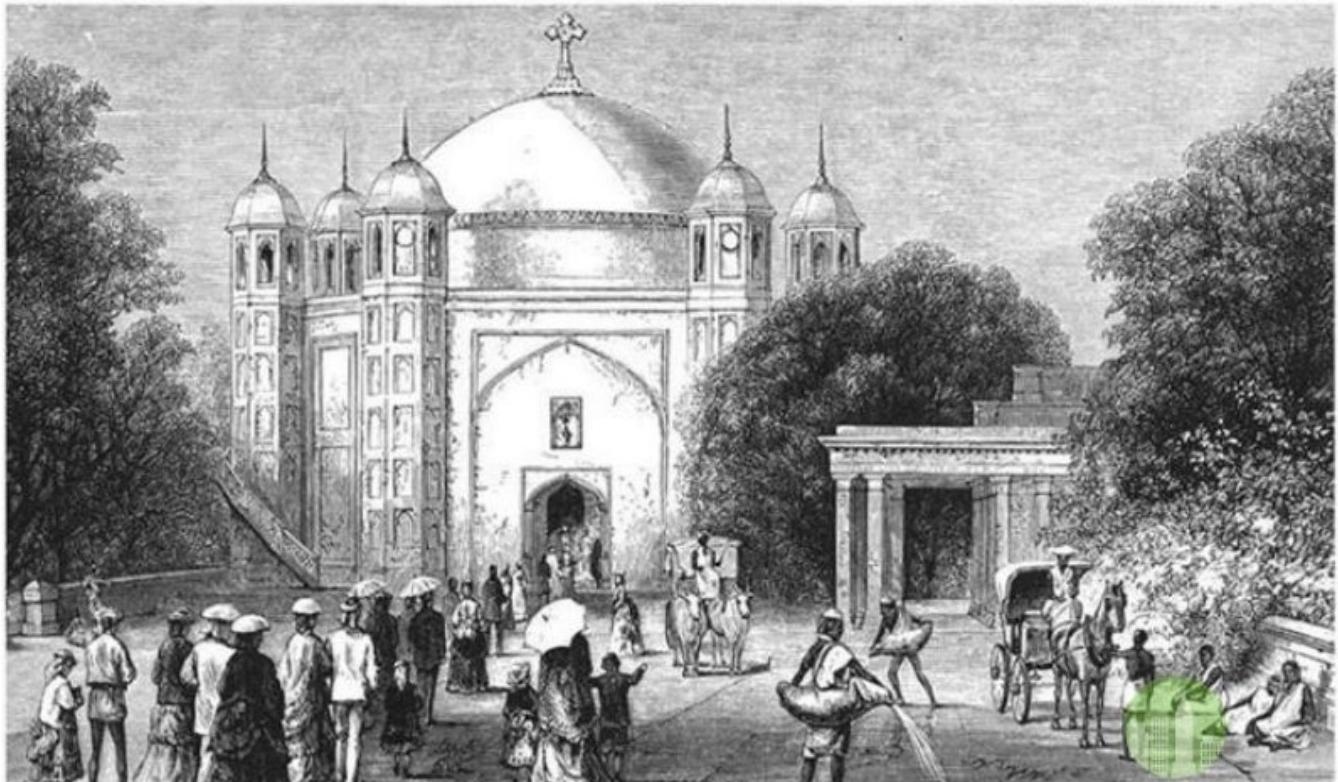


Fig. 5:The alleged tomb of Anarkali

reported to have fallen violently in love with the daughter of Zain Khan Koka, the foster brother of Akbar and a high noble. For some reason, Akbar did not approve of the match and a rift occurred between the father and the son. Salim's infatuation was, however, so intense that Akbar yielded to the persuasion of his mother Hamida Banu, and the wedding took place in her apartments on 8 *Tir* 41 R.Y./ AH 1004(29 June 1596)<sup>10</sup> it is, thus, probable that the rumour mill got hold of Salim's dispute with his father on a martial issue. Within four months of Salim's marriage with Zain Kahn Koka's daughter, in the evening 26 *Mehr* of the same year(19 October 1596), the mother of Prince Danyal died; the very next day an 'old' concubine of Akbar passed away and the day after, on 28 *Mehr* (21 October 1596), Prince Salim's wife, who was the daughter of Raja Ali Khan, the ruler of Khandesh, died<sup>11</sup>. She had been sent by her father, in token of submission, at the end of April 1593, on the persuasion of Akbar's envoy, the poet Faizi, to marry Prince Salim, the Heir apparent.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the deaths of Danyal's mother and Salim's wife with the difference of two days caused their identities to be confused, Danyal's mother being confounded with Jahangir's wife, for whom Jahangir's inscribed declaration of love were really intended. The confusion may have been aided

by the fact that Danyal's mother had been a concubine(*Khawwas*) of Akbar<sup>13</sup>, and there is, therefore, a possibility that she might have originally borne the harem name of Anar-Kali.

Another event that might have added to the rumour. Sometime between 5 and 10 October 1595, that is, barely two weeks before Raja Ali Khan's daughter's death, a lady of Akbar's harem(apparently a concubine) had some allegation levelled against her conduct, whereupon Akbar ordered a trial by fire. She is reported by Abu'l Fazl to have proved her innocence by holding a fireball in her hand for a while and then putting it down on the ground with no haste. While the ground bore the effects of the fire, her hand remained unscathed. Abu'l Fazl does not give her name but uses the phrase *parsa gauhar* (chaste pearl) for her.<sup>14</sup> Again, it is possible that this incident about a possible affair in the harem lent colour to the construction of the Anarkali story.

The couplet and the engraving 'Salim-i-Akbar' leave little room for any doubt that the tomb is that of a wife of Jahangir who died at Lahore when he was still a prince. A confusion with Danyal's mother in regard to the tomb was only possible if the wife of Jahangir buried here is the daughter of Raja Ali

10 Ibid., p.710.

11 Ibid., p.713

12 Ibid., p.639

13 Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, ed. Syed Ahmad, Aligarh, 1864, p.15. There is a more accessible photo-reprint with index, Aligarh, 2007.

14 *Akbarnama*, Vol. III, p.672

Khan, who was married to Salim in 1593, and died within two days of the death of Danyal's mother. No birth of a child from her is reported. Now Salim became enamored with Zain Khan Koka's daughter and married her in 1596, within months of which Raja Ali Khan's daughter died. The engraved couplet, which seems the characteristic of Jahangir, has a tinge of remorse, possibly felt at the neglect the princess might have suffered at his hands during his pursuit of marriage with Zain Khan's daughter. It is true that this still does not suit the year AH 1008(AD 1599) engraved on the tomb, because Raja Ali Khan's Daughter died in AH 1005(AD 1596). The year 1008 can, then, be explained only as the *Hijri* year when the tomb's construction began.

If one rejects this explanation, which seems to be the most plausible, we have Baqar's suggestion that the tomb is that of Sahib Jamal, the wife of Jahangir and mother of Prince Parvez, though Baqar confuses her with the daughter of Zain Khan Koka<sup>15</sup>. As reported by Abu'l Fazl, Sahib Jamal died on 15 *Tir*, 44 R.Y. that is on 7 July 1599<sup>16</sup>, just towards the end of AH 1007. Such a date may conceivably suit better the year inscribed on the tomb, AH 1008 whose beginning corresponds to 24 July 1599.

However, Abu'l Fazl does not specifically mentions where the death took place, neither does Akbar nor Salim was at Lahore at the time. Some members of the imperial household had, however, remained at Lahore till the early months of 1599, since Abu'l Fazl says that one of Akbar's concubines, who was the mother of Princess Shahzada Khanam, died on 3 *Khurdad* (24 May 1599) and the information of her death reached the court at Agra on 12 *Khurdad* (3 June 1599)<sup>17</sup>. Soon afterwards Abu'l Fazl reports the death of Parvez's mother but simply says she died on the *Ilahi* date corresponding to 7 July 1599. Nothing is said of any communication on the news being received at the court at Agra, from any other place. Indeed, Akbar is said to have personally consoled the grief-stricken ladies, by a visit to the female apartments<sup>18</sup>. This strongly suggest that she had died at Agra. If so, she could not have been buried in the Anarkali's tomb at Lahore.

It is, therefore, likely on the balance of evidence that the Anarkali's tomb is really that of Raja Ali Khan's daughter. As for Anarkali's legend, its interest lies in how rumour creates a legend. The textual sources of the Mughal period have no reference to the story. Sujan Rai Bhandari's *Khulasatu'l Tawarikh* (1695) in its description of Lahore (where the author lived in the reign of Aurangzeb) has no reference to it. Among most recent writers, Muhammad Hussain Azad (latter half of nineteenth century), who himself lived in Lahore, does not mention it in his *Darbar-i-Akbari*, which is a volume full of information about individuals connected with Akbar. It is, therefore, rather surprising that Latif writing in 1892 fully accepted the Anarkali's legend and reproduced it with much addition made to Finch's version, but with no reference to Danyal's mother. He wrote, 'The inscription shows how passionately fond Salim had been of Anarkali', and how deeply her death had grieved him<sup>19</sup> it was to the credit of Muhammad Baqir that he, at least, doubted that story and, without going into the detailed historical evidence, suggested that the tomb is of Sahib Jamal, though implausibly, as we have seen.<sup>20</sup> In spite of this, some modern writers either explicitly accept the story or keep describing the tomb simply as that of Anarkali without expressing any reservation over it.<sup>21</sup>

I have come across one writer who rejects the story but only out of some religious scruple. He doubts the genuineness of the inscriptions, arguing how 'an emperor (and that too a Muslim) could afford to publicly make such a wish to his beloved and would take the liberty to be romantic and a little poetic too'. He finally concludes 'Many Muslim writers assert that it was an effort by non-Muslim historians to defame the Muslim rulers. Were Muslim rulers so cruel to the slaves and womenfolk?'<sup>22</sup> such an argument rests on the assumption that make it so difficult to contest it. The inscriptions have all the signs of genuineness, such as the absence of his later royal title Jahangir and use of simple designation Salim-i-Akbar. It may be remarked, however, that these inscriptions were not meant for public gaze. The grave was not open to the public as Mughal Monuments are today, and what Jahangir got

<sup>15</sup> This error might have occurred because Syed Ahmad's edition of the *Tuzuk*(p.7) has a misprint making Parvez 'the son of the daughter of Sahib Jamal[daughter] of Zain Khan Koka'. The mistake is corrected in the translation of the *Tuzuk* by A. Rogers and H. Beveridge, London, 1902, Vol. I, p.19 &n. Sahib Jamal was a cousin of zain Khan: Abul Fazl clearly says she was a daughter of Khawaja Hasan, uncle of Zain Khan Kokaltash (*Akbarnama*, Vol. III, p.568).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.757

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.756

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.,p.757

<sup>19</sup> S. Muhammad Latif, *Lahore*, op. cit., p.187

<sup>20</sup> Baqir, op. cit., pp.432-33

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Ihsan H. Nadiem, *Historic Landmarks of Lahore*, Lahore, 2006, pp.57-58

<sup>22</sup> Nazir Ahmad Chaudhary, *Anarkali-Archives and Tomb of Sahib Jamal*, Lahore, 2002, p.20



Fig. 6: Madhubala as Anarkali in the popular Bollywood movie Mughal-i-Azam

inscribed was, thus, not for the public eye at all. The 99 names of God also remind us of Jahangir's direction, at which the scholars supplied him with 90 names of God, so that he might vary the recitations of his name while turning his rosary.<sup>23</sup>

If our reconstruction of the events is correct which gave rise to Anarkali's story is correct, then we can easily set the three stages of the growth of the legend: first, a confusion between Danyal's mother (a concubine) and a genuine wife of Prince Salim (Jahangir), and the conversion of a natural death into an execution; second, the mother of Danyal disappeared and only a concubine of Akbar remained; and, finally, more recently, Anarkali became just a young maid in the harem around whom popular films can be made! The original confusion tells us something about the rumour mill that worked because of the huge veil of seclusion surrounding the imperial harem. Perhaps, some rumours or stories floated through eunuchs guarding the female apartments. In these rumours, the identities of the two women who died close to each other could get mixed, so that the ex-concubine's name and identity were transferred to the son's wife. An interesting fact surely is that it was widely believed in his own time that Akbar could have inflicted such a punishment as walling up a woman alive, for this 'fact' is related as early as 1611, within six years after his death. Harem seclusion obviously

generated all kinds of belief about what could happen within it.

The other striking feature of the legend is that for so long it has been transmitted just orally without entering Persian or indigenous records until the late nineteenth century. Perhaps, even during, Jahangir's reign, it was not possible to conceal entirely the texts of Jahangir's inscription on the tomb, private as they were intended to be, and so what he wrote of his devotion to his wife could become a further basis for popular rumour about an old illicit love.

Or, did the transition survive so stoutly because it was simply a good story- the tragedy of a poor maid who became the object of a prince's love? Perhaps, an eternal truth still lay behind a legend that was factually untrue: the truth that the poor and the weak suffer under all circumstances. No objections from historians will, therefore, probably be of much avail against the persistence of the Anarkali story.

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<sup>23</sup> *Tuzuk-i-jahangiri*, ed, Syed Ahmad, Aligarh, 1864, p.9

## Demystifying the Popular Myths around the Building and Abandonment of Fathpur Sikri

-Prof. S.A. Nadeem Rezavi



Fig. 7: Fathpur Sikri

There are a number of interpretations, mostly mythical which centre around the medieval city of Fathpur Sikri, specially around how it originated, why it was 'abandoned' and when did it 'cease' to exist. Was it a town which was conceived, originated, flourished and then withered during a single reign? Or did it continue even after it was 'abandoned' by Akbar as his capital and continued to do so even during the subsequent reigns? Was it 'abandoned' due to a severe paucity of water? It is held that the city was designed and built within the span of half a generation and 'abandoned' in favour of another famous capital, making it one of the most unique example of its kind. Thus for example, Tieffenthaler, who visited this city around 1786, finding it almost totally abandoned was constrained to remark that its short life resembled "a flower that blooms in the morning and withers at night".<sup>1</sup>

The signs of its decay appear to have set in even before it was abandoned by Akbar in 1585 as his *darus Saltanat*,

when the Emperor marched from Fathpur Sikri for Kabul after the death of his cousin Mirza Muhammad Hakim. Although till 1585, Fathpur was considered a joint capital along with Agra,<sup>2</sup> and continued as a mint-town,<sup>3</sup> yet, recent studies point out that by 1580-81, it stopped uttering gold coins and by 1581-82 the silver and copper-coins also became extant.<sup>4</sup> By 1591 the general population of the town also appears to have migrated for better avenues. When in the late months of this year Allami Faizi, the famous poet of Akbar, passed through it an embassy to the rulers of Khandesh and Ahmadnagar he reported:

“When I arrived at *dār as -saltanat* Fathpur, having first been elevated by kissing the threshold of the palace (*daulatkhanā*), I said a prayer for the well being of His Majesty (Akbar). What can I write about the true condition of the city? The mud

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Tieffenthaler, "La Geographic de Indostan, e'erite in Latin, dans le pays même", Tr. into French & ed. by Jean Bernoulli, Description historique et géographique de l'Inde, vol. I, 1786, p. 169, Cf. M. Brand & G.D. Lowry, Fatehpur Sikri: A Source Book, Massachusetts, 1985.

<sup>2</sup>Account of Ralph Fitch, Early Travels in India, 1583-1619, cd. W. Foster, Oxford, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Bayazid Bayal, Tazkira-i Humayun wa Akbar, Hidayat Husain, Calcutta, 1941, p.373.

<sup>4</sup>See Irfan Habib, "The Economic and Social Setting", in Brand & Lowry (ed.) Fatehpur Sikri, Marg Pubn., Bombay, 1987, p.79.

buildings (*imārāt-i gilīn*) have all dissolved into the ground, [although] the stone walls have remained. Having inspected some of the pavilions (*pishkhānahā*) and private houses (*khalwat khānahā*) from afar and some from close-up, I learnt a moral lesson, Especially so from the house (*khāna*) of Mir Falhullah Shirazi and I also went to the pavilion (*pishkhana*) of Hakim Abul Fath Gilani, it too being unique on the world's horizon.”<sup>5</sup>

Similar is the comment of William Finch, who passed through the city in November 1610, that is fifteen years after it ceased to be the *darul khilafa* and only five years after Akbar's death. According to him Fathpur was “lying like a waste desert; and very dangerous to pass through in the night, the buildings lying waste without any inhabitants.”<sup>6</sup>

This, and much more, has led to the forming of a general impression that Fathpur Sikri was totally 'abandoned' and 'deserted' soon after it ceased to be the capital of the Mughal Empire. Another popular thesis which has come to surround this 'abandonment' is the theory of paucity of water which has been repeated by almost all text-book writers and even serious historians. This paper however endeavors to show that although Fathpur was "abandoned" as a capital city, yet (i) it was not due to shortage of water, and (ii) it continued to "live" and thrive as an imperial Mughal town, at least till the reign of Shahjahan.

Let us first deal with the question of availability of water. This problem appears to have been highlighted for the first time by Jahangir in his 13th RY (1619 A.D.). While giving the details of the Jami Masjid and the *birka* (under-ground covered water tank) constructed in the courtyard of this mosque, Jahangir commented:

“As Fathpur has little water (*kam āb*), and what there is, is bad (*bad āb*), this *birka* yields a sufficient supply for the whole year for the members of the family (of Salim Chishti) and for the dervishes

who are the *mujawirs* (keepers) of the Masjid.”<sup>7</sup>

Khwaja Kamgar Husaini repeats the same and almost in the same words.<sup>8</sup>

This charge of 'less water' by Jahangir is intriguing indeed, as we find that no source of Akbar's period, whether official chronicles, or Akbar's bitter critic Badauni nor the private letters of the inhabitants of Fathpur during the phase when it was the *dārus saltanat* ever make even a passing reference to it. Contrarily, when Babur was preparing to fight his famous battle with Rana Sanga in 1527, he found that “the well-watered ground for a large camp was at Sikri.”<sup>9</sup> The abundance of water at Fathpur Sikri was due to the presence of a large water body, which late during the reign of Akbar was dammed and given the formal shake of a lake. In a letter written in 1580, Fr. Henrques informs that:

“...about a year ago, in order to improve the city, water has been led in from somewhere to form a sizeable lake which is perennial. All the elephants, horses and cattle drink from it, and it also serves the teeming population for all purposes.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Monserrate, this lake, which was dammed to supply the city with water, was 'two miles long and half a mile long'.<sup>11</sup> In 1610, William Finch estimated this lake to be two or three 'cos' in length and found it “abounding with good fish and wild fowl”, and full of *singhāra* fruits.<sup>12</sup> When in 1619, Jahangir ordered to be measured, it was found that its circumference was 7 *Kos*.<sup>13</sup> During the same year, when he resolved not to kill with his own hands any living thing, he ordered 700 antelopes which had been rounded up for hunting to be delivered to the polo ground near the lake where they would remain unharmed.<sup>14</sup> Naturally he knew the water from the said lake would sustain such large number of animals. Sujan Rai Bhadari, writing as late as 1695-96, while describing Fathpur Sikri mentioned that “adjacent to it (the city) is a *kulāb-i buzurg* which in its length and breadth is 10 *kuroh* from which the people

5 Allami Faizi, *Insha-i Faizi*, ed. A.D. Irshad, Lahore, 1973, pp.84-85.

6 William Finch, in Early Travels in India: 1583-1619, cd. W. Foster, London, 1921, p. 149.

7 Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i Jahangiri*, Ghazipur & Aligarh, 1863-64, p.266.

8 Khwaja Kamgar Husaini, *Ma'asir-i Jahangiri*, cd. Azra Alavi, Delhi, 1978, p.271

9 Zahiruddin Babur, *Baburnama*, tr. A.S. Beveridge, Delhi, 1970 (reprint) p.548.

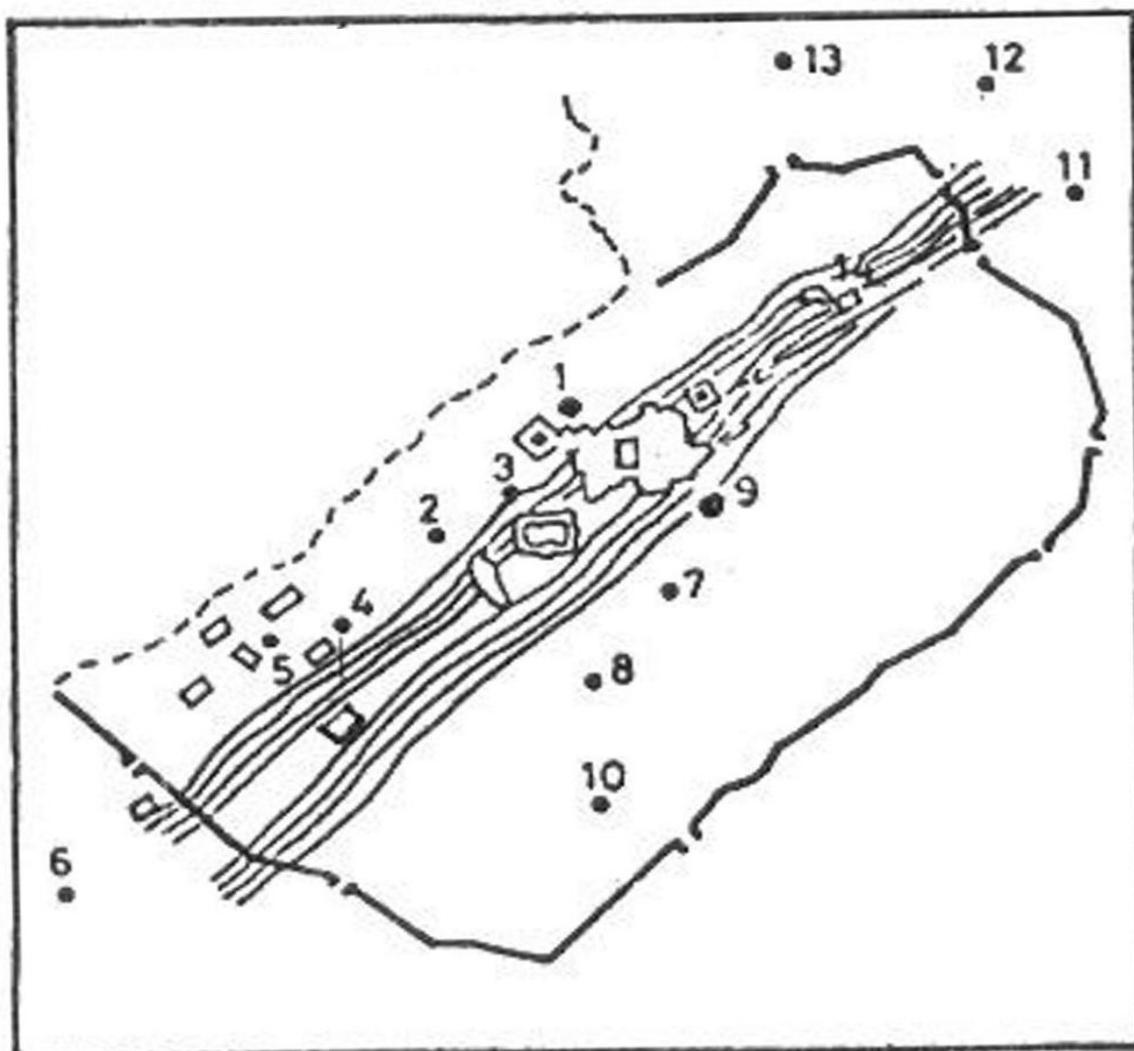
10 Letter to Fr. Henrques to Fr. Peres, in Letters from the Mughal Court: The First Jesuit Mission to Akbar (1580-1583), ed. Correia-Afonso, Bombay, 1980, pp.22-23.

11 Fr. Monserrate, The Commentary of Father Monserrate, S.J. tr. Hoyland, London, 1922, p.31.

12 Finch, op.cit., pp. 150-51.

13 Tuzuk, op.cit p.259.

14 Ibid, p.268.



### Sources of water supply

Tank      □  
Baoli      •

Fig. 8: Plan I

used to draw benefit (during Akbars period)”<sup>15</sup>

A survey of Fathpur Sikri and its environs further reveals that apart from the lake there were other sources of water supply. As discussed elsewhere, there were at least 13 step wells (*bāolis*) and 8 water tanks apart from a large number of ordinary wells interspersed all over the walled city.<sup>16</sup> [See Plan I] Of these at least one, the so-called “Hakim's Baoli” (the Southern Waterworks, no.9 on the plan) is still

functional and caters to the needs of the town's population. (The Fathpur Municipal Corporation has fitted it with pipes and a motor to draw the water). Apart from that, the *birka* mentioned by Jahangir, as well as the huge water tank (*jhālra*), still cater to the needs of the people in the habitation on top of the ridge as well as the visitors to the mosque. Most of the other *bāolis* are in such a preserved condition, that some debris cleaning could make them functional.<sup>17</sup>

15 Sujan Rai Bhandari, *Khulāsat-ut-Tawārīkh* ed., Zafar Husain, Delhi, 1998, p.40.

16 Explorations and surveys in the vicinity of Fathpur Sikri were conducted intermittently between 1989 and 1999. I am thankful to Mr. Anis Alvi, Mr. Hussam Haider, Mr. Zameer Ahmad of the Archaeology section of the department in assisting me in these surveys and Mr. Ghulam Mujtaba for taking the required photographs. Mr. Zameer Ahmad has made all the plans for me.

17 During the course of the survey the author found some justification for Jahangir's comment on bad āb in the sense that some of the wells between Baoli No.4 & No.2 towards the Laki in the North, had saline (khāri) water which is used only for irrigation.

Interestingly enough, Maryam Makani, the queen-mother, remained stationed at Fathpur even after Akbar left the capital for Lahore in 1585.<sup>18</sup> When for a brief period, Akbar visited Fathpur in August 1601; the queen was much rejoiced in meeting him.<sup>19</sup>

From Abul Fazl's account it appears that the residents of Fathpur Sikri were quite puzzled as to why Akbar was not returning back. Hakim Abul Fath Gilani, who resided at Fathpur, reveals his amazement and depression that Akbar was residing at Lahore and not returning to Fathpur.<sup>20</sup> Had it been the paucity of water, he would have been aware of it. In fact in 1581 he had been urging one of his friends to migrate to this city, as, amongst other reasons, commerce (*tijārat*) was "better pursued at Fathpur, which is the capital city (*pāi-takht*)"<sup>21</sup>. Surely till this time there was no 'crisis' which the city was suffering from. We know that throughout its life as a capital city, there had only been one water related crisis, and that was when the so-called *Hauz-i Shīrīn* (the *kulāb* as mentioned by Abul Fazl) burst in 1584. Celebrations were going on and nobles were busy playing games like *chaupar* (draughts), *shatranj* (chess) and *ganjifa* (cards) when suddenly:

"...A side of that little river (*daryācha*) gave way, and the water gushed out in fury. Though by the blessings of the holy personality (Akbar?), none of the courtiers was injured, yet many people of lower rank (*mardum-i pā'in*) suffered loss and many houses built below were carried away by the flood. Inspite of the great crowd of those known to the King, only one, Madadi (in another Ms. Madwi), the *cheetahbān* (leopard trainer) lost his life...."<sup>22</sup>

However, the tank appears to have been rebuilt soon after. Did this bursting of the tank give rise to the theory of *kam āb* (scarcity of water) at Fathpur Sikri and its 'abandonment' as the *dārus sultānat* by Akbar in the very next year in 1585? Had it been so, Badauni would have surely highlighted it. Surprisingly Badauni fails to even record this occurrence. Then why did Akbar prefer Lahore over Fathpur Sikri after 1585? Abul Fazl tries to provide

an answer when he mentions that:

"(Akbar's) sole thought was that he would stay for a while in the Punjab, and would give peace to the Zabuli land (Afghanistan), close Swad and Bajaur of the stain of rebellion, uproot the thorn of the *tārikīyan* (i.e. the Raushanniyas) from Tirali and Bangash, seize the garden of Kashmir, and bring the populars country of Tatta (Sindh) within the Empire. Furthermore, should the ruler of Turan remove the foot of friendliness, he would send a glorious army thither, and follow it up in person."<sup>23</sup>

This situation had arisen due to the death of Mirza Muhammad Hakim's death. On his return, Akbar had to turn his attention towards the Dcccan and proceeded against a rebellions son. Thus, probably, it was the political reasons of why Akbar left Sikri and on return preferred the security of Agra fort. J.F. Richards seeks to provide an ideological answer to this question. According to him Akbar preferred Fathpur till he was devoted to the Chishli saints. In 1585, his pilgrimages to the Sufi saints stopped.

'Akbar's departure from Fatehpur Sikri coincided with a definite change in religious attitude'.<sup>24</sup>

Should this transfer of capital from Fathpur Sikri to Lahore in 1585 and then subsequently to Agra be taken as the 'abandonment' in the sense that it is generally perceived? If we take the statements of Allami Faizi and Finch at their face value, then with years of Akbar's leave court at Fathpur Sikri, the whole town had turned to ruins. But then, we have seen, Maryam Makani remained stationed at her palace even after Akbar's departure. Akbar returned to his erstwhile capital, albeit briefly, in 1601, i.e., after ten years of Allami Faizi's account. If we read Faizi's statement carefully, it would become apparent that he is mentioning the mansions of the nobles who, being ministers and courtiers, migrated along with the Emperor. Hakim Fathullah Shirazi had left Fathpur before Akbar went towards Lahore, and never returned back.<sup>25</sup> Hakim Abul Fath died at the time when Akbar was marching from Kashmir to

18 Abul Fazl, Akbarnama, Calcutta, 1873-87 vol. II pp.466, 493, 581.

19 Ibid., III, p.794.

20 Ruqaat-i AbulFath Gilani, ed. M. Basheer Husain, Lahore, 1968, p.57.

21 Ibid., p.46.

22 Akbamama., op.cit., HI, pp.391-92.

23 Ibid., II, 748.

24 J.F. Richards, "The Imperial Capital", in Fathpur Sikri, ed. Brand & Lowry, op. cit., pp.66-72; idem, "The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir", in Kingship and Authority in South Asia, ed. J.F. Richards. Madison, 1978, pp.255-71.

25 Shah Nawaz Khan, Ma'asirul Umara, Calcutta, 1888-91, Vol.I, p. 101.



Fig. 9: An aerial view of Fathpur Sikri

Kabul in 1589.<sup>26</sup> Thus he too had died in the same year as Fathullah Shirazi had left Fathpur before Akbar went towards Lahore, and never returned back. Further, the *imarāt-i gilīn* (mud houses) which "dissolved into the ground" were either the houses of the retainers of these nobles, or temporary residences of the service class, which would have suffered due to the migration of their employers. We know that at least till 1626 a "faire" and "goodly" *bazar*, with "pleasant Mansions" on all sides was flourishing and thriving.<sup>27</sup>

It appears that by 1610, Fathpur had emerged as a trading Centre. It had turned into a centre for Indigo plantation (*nil*) where foreign merchants were attracted.<sup>28</sup> We know that Fathpur Sikri was situated on the Agra-Ajmer highway and was part of the indigo producing tract. We also hear of a large quantity of "corne" which was grown in this area.<sup>29</sup> We come to know that Fathpur was also known for the manufacture of Woolen carpets, apparently through the settlement of the Persian carpet weavers (*qali-bāfs*).<sup>30</sup> This carpet weaving industry also seems to have survived the transfer of capital. Pelsaert says that these carpet weavers at Fathpur could weave "fine or coarse" carpets as per the requirement.<sup>31</sup> It

was in consequence to this that the markets at this town kept on to thrive. Incidentally none of this would have been possible had there been some scarcity of water. Indigo cultivation, we know, requires large quantities of sweet water.

Thus it appears that by Jahangir's time, the nature of the township was transformed from being a capital-city to

a merchant town. With the transfer of the capital, the nobility had generally migrated, along with its retainers to Agra, thus forcing the contemporary travellers to comment on its "ruined" conditions and the fallen to the ground houses. These abandoned noble's structures were then taken over, near the *bāzār-i sang* (the 'Chaharsuq', as it is now known), by the members of the mercantile classes, which is indirectly testified by the accounts of some of the European visitors.<sup>32</sup>

The ruined condition of the noble's houses, however, does not necessarily point to the urban decay of a Mughal Town. Describing the houses of the Mughal nobility, Pelsaert opines that "these houses last for a few years only, because the walls are built with mud instead of mortar"<sup>33</sup> (compare Faizi's comment). Elsewhere commenting on the Mughal ethos and psyche, Pelsaert writes:

"Wealth, position, love, friendship, confidence, everything hangs by a thread. Nothing is permanent, yea, even the noble buildings - gardens, tombs or palaces, - which in and every city, one cannot contemplate without pity or distress because

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, I, p.559.

<sup>27</sup>Finch, op. cit., p. 149; Sir Thomas Herbert, Some Years Travels into Africa and Asia the Great, London, 1638, p.73, cf. Fatehpur Sikri: A Source Book, op. cit., p.81.

<sup>28</sup>Finch, op. cit., p. 149; John Jourdain, The Journal of John Jourdain: 1608-17, Ed. W. Foster, Hakluyt Society, 1905, p. 168.

<sup>29</sup>Finch, op. cit., p. 149; Richard Steel and John Crowther, "A Journal of the Journey of Richard Steel and John Crowther: 1615-16", Purchas His Pilgrims, Vol.IV, Glasgow, 1905, p.266.

<sup>30</sup>Abul Fazl, Ain-iAkbari, ed. Blochman, Bib. Ind., Calcutta, 1867-77, vol.1, p.50.

<sup>31</sup>Pelsaert, Remonstratie or Jahangir's India, tr. Moreland & Geyl, Delhi, 1972. p.9; also Thevenot, Indian Travels of Thevenot and Careri, tr. ed. S.N. Sen, New Delhi, 1949, p.56.

<sup>32</sup>For example, Herbert, op.cit, p.73; also Finch, op.cit., p. 149. The Survey of these excavated noble's houses revealed that these large mansions, at some later stage, were divided by additional brick-walls into smaller dwelling units. See Chapter V.

<sup>33</sup>Pelsaert, op. cit., p.66.

because of their ruined state. For in this they are to be despised above all the laziest nations of the world, because they build them with so many hundred of thousands [of labourers?] and keep them in repair only so long as the owners live and have the means. *Once the builder is dead, no one will care for the buildings;* the son will neglect his father's work, the mother her son's, brothers and friends will take no care for each other's buildings; everyone tries, as far as possible, to erect a new building of his own, and establish his own reputation along side that of his ancestors. Consequently, it may be said that if all these buildings and erections were attended to and repaired for a century, the lands of every city, and even a village, would be adorned with monuments; *but as a mailer offact the roads leading to the cities are strewn with fallen columns of stone.*”<sup>34</sup>

This passage of Pelsaert provides an apt requiem to the information provided by William Finch, Faizi and others. We know that Pelsaert had been to Fathpur Sikri and was aware of its conditions. Thus it was more due to the social ethos and the architectural weakness, rather than a mass exodus, that a number of once handsome, noble's edifices collapsed.

Although Fathpur Sikri was never destined to attract the same attention as it did under Akbar, yet it was never totally neglected by the Mughal rulers at least up till the reign of Shahjahan. Herbert visited the town in the early decades of Jahangir's accession. If he is to be believed, the new Emperor in order to commemorate the victory over his son, Khusrau, erected “a place of hunting” and a “stately castle” at Fathpur.<sup>35</sup> Jahangir in his *memoirs* testifies to having ordered (in the 14th RY) the *Chaughan* (polo ground) near the Hiran Minar, to be enclosed and converted into a park to contain a large number of antelopes in order to “enjoy the pleasure of sport and that at the same time no harm should happen to

them”.<sup>36</sup>

From the *memoirs* of Jahangir, it appears that the Emperor did not visit Fathpur in the first 12 years of his rule. It was in the last few months of his 13th RY (AD 1619) that Jahangir headed towards his father's capital city and “entered the inhabited part of Fathpur”.<sup>37</sup> Prior to that, Jahangir says, he remained encamped eight days on the banks of the Fathpur Sikri lake<sup>38</sup>, due to the outbreak of plague (*tā'ūn*) in the city of Agra<sup>39</sup>, the Emperor was forced to stay at Fathpur Sikri for a period of around three and a half months (January to mid-April 1619).<sup>40</sup> It was at Fathpur Sikri that the celebrations of the commencement of the 14th RY (*Nauruz*), was celebrated with much festivity.<sup>41</sup> The celebrations of Khurram's 28th year of birth were also held at this time.<sup>42</sup> On this occasion, Muhammad Salih Kamboh says that the *daulatakhāna* (royal palace) of Fathpur was decorated “according to the annual custom”.<sup>43</sup> On the same day Jahangir showed the prince the grand buildings constructed by Akbar at Fathpur Sikri.<sup>44</sup>

From the account of his visit to Sikri in 1619 it appears that a number of grandees had their mansions in that city. Jahangir mentions that on the invitation of Itimad-ud-Daula and Asaf Khan he visited their residences.<sup>45</sup> Were these structures only temporary abodes of these nobles, the abandoned houses of Akbari nobles? Describing his first visit to the house of Itimad-ud-Daulah, Jahangir mentions:

“As the house of Itimadud Daulah was on the bank of a tank (*tāl*), and people praised it greatly as a delightfully place and enchanting residence, at his request on Thursday, the 26th (*Bahman*), an entertainment was held there...”<sup>46</sup>

The second visit to his house was after the *nauroz* celebrations of the 14th RY, when Itimadud Daulah

34 Ibid,p.56.

35 Herbert, op. cit., p.73. However, in 1633, when Peter Mundy visited Fathpur Sikri, he did not see a walled "Parke or Meadow" meant for the beasts. See Mundy, Travels in Europe and Asia, 1608-1667, Haklyut Society, 1907, Vol.11, p.230. But then see the following foot note.

36 Tuzuk, op. cit., p.268.

37 Ibid., p.260.

38 Ibid, pp.259, 260; Mu'tamid Khan, Iqbalnama-i Jahangiri, ed. Abdul Hayy & Ahmad Ali, Calcutta, 1868, pp. 122-23; Khwaja Kamgar Husaini, Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, op.cit., p.271.

39Tuzuk, op. cit., p.260; Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, op. cit., p.272

40 Jahangir had arrived at Sikri in the month of Safar and left for Agra on 4th of Jumadi-ul Awwal, 1028 A.H. See Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, op. cit., pp.271, 277.

41 Tuzuk, op. cit., p.260; Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, op. cit., p.275.

42 Tuzuk, p.260, Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, p.276; Muhammad Salih Kumboh, Amal-i Salih, ed. Yazdani, Calcutta, 1912, vol.1, pp. 126-27.

43 Amal-i Salih, op. cit., p. 127.

44 Tuzuk, p.260.

45 Ibid., p.263, 266.

46 Tuzuk, p.263.

Daulah is reported to have decorated his residence, the *tāl* as well as the “streets both near and far” with all kinds of lights and coloured lanterns.<sup>47</sup> A week later the Emperor was entertained in the house of Asaf Khan which was a fine and pleasant place.<sup>48</sup> These references suggest that these houses in the city had been constructed by their owners themselves.

Jahangir appears to have visited Fatehpur Sikri only once again four years tale in 1623.<sup>49</sup>

Shahjahan appears to have paid more attention towards Fatehpur. Even before, his accession, when he had rebelled against Jahangir and besieged Agra, he made Fatehpur his camp<sup>50</sup>. When he ascended the throne in 1628, he held the weighing ceremony on the occasion of the completion of his 38th year and the beginning of his 39th year (of age) in the *daulatkhanā* of Fatehpur Sikri.<sup>51</sup>

In 1635, Shahjahan visited Fatehpur Sikri, a second time as an Emperor, and reportedly camped there for a brief period of three days.<sup>52</sup> His subsequent visits were in 1637 and 1643.<sup>53</sup> On all these three visits, the purpose appears to have been to bunt for the wild fowls and excursions on the lake 'that equalled the Ab-i Jayhun' (a prominent river near Balkh). The next visit of Shahjahan took place in 1644 at a time when plague once again had spread at Agra. The Emperor celebrated the festival of *Id al-Adhā* (Baqr Id) and offered prayers at the Jami' Masjid. Lahori and Inayat Khan, while describing these festivities inform that on the occasion “the crowd of people had grown to such an extent that a thronging and milling assembly spilled into the gateway of the Mosque”, and during the ensuing stampede a person died and many were injured. Amongst the injured,<sup>54</sup> one person was a state guest whom the emperor compensated with a grant of Rs.3000/-.<sup>55</sup> This

evidence of Lahori and Inayat Khan suggests that at least till this date (1644) a sizeable civic population still inhabited this former capital of the Mughal Empire. The sizeable population also goes to explain the still throbbing *bāzār* which Peter Mundy encountered in 1633.<sup>56</sup> The viability of Fatehpur Sikri is also testified by the fact that in 1645, Mirza Hasan Safavi, a *mansabdār* of 3000/2000, was made its *faujdar* and *jagirdar*.<sup>57</sup>

Sometime before 1653, the prestige of Fatehpur Sikri was further enhanced when Shahjahan ordered the construction of his own palace outside the palaces of Akbar. Muhammad Waris informs us that this *daulatkhanā* was situated overlooking the banks of the lake.<sup>58</sup> It was in this palace that Shahjahan stayed during his visits of 1653 and 1654.

The description as given by Waris is quite brief yet is clear enough to indicate the rough location of this structure. To be towards the lake, any imperial building could only have been constructed somewhere on top of the ridge behind the Hiran Minar and the Hathipol (the main entrance of the Imperial complex) towards the Jami Masjid and the 'Shaikhupura', the Chishti quarters.

During the course of a survey, the present author located the Shahjahani *Daulatkhanā* adjacent to the so-called 'Samosa-Mahal' on the Hāthi Pol Shaikhupura road. The structure had been initially excavated by Prof. R.C. Gaur during the course of his National Project on Fatehpur Sikri and subsequently labelled as “Minor Haram Sara”<sup>59</sup>. Situated on the rim of the ridge behind the Jami Masjid, this complex [See Plan II] extends down to the plains below the side, where a subsequent survey revealed a Shahjahani *bāoli*, pleasure pavilions

47 Ibid., p.266.

48 Ibid

49 Ibid., p.458; Ma'asir-i Jahangiri, p.367.

50 Herbert, op. cit., p.83; Manrique, Travels of Fray Sebastian Manrique, 1629-1643, Haklyut Society, 1927, pp.304, 306, 307.

51 Abdul Hamid Lahori, Padshahnama, ed. K. Ahmad & M.A. Rahim, Calcutta, 1867, Vol.1, pt.I, p.243; Inayat Khan, Shahjahanama. ed. Begley & Desai, tr. A. Fuller, Delhi, 1990, p.28.

52 Lahori, op. cit., I, ii, 105.

53 Ibid, I, ii. 276; II, p.344.

54 Lahori, op. cit., II, p.353; Inayat Khan, op. cit., p.305.

55 Lahori, op. cit., II, p.356.

56 See Supra

57 Lahori, op. cit., II, p.431, Shahjahan visited Fatehpur Sikri in this year as well. See Lahori, II, p.407.

58 Muhammad Waris, Padshahnama, MS. BM. Or. 1675, pp.244, 285 (transcript in Research Library, Department of History, Aligarh). I am thankful to Prof. Irfan Habib who pointed out this information to me and asked me to go and 'locate' the structure. The structure was found at exactly the point where Prof Habib had laid his finger without actually visiting the site.

59 R.C. Gaur, Excavations at Fatehpur Sikri, New Delhi, 2000, pp.17-25; See also Gaur, "The Archaeology of Urban Mughal India: Excavations at Fatehpur Sikri", presidential address, Santi Niketan, December, 1988; idem, Excavations at Fatehpur Sikri (A National Project), New Delhi, 2000, pp.17-24

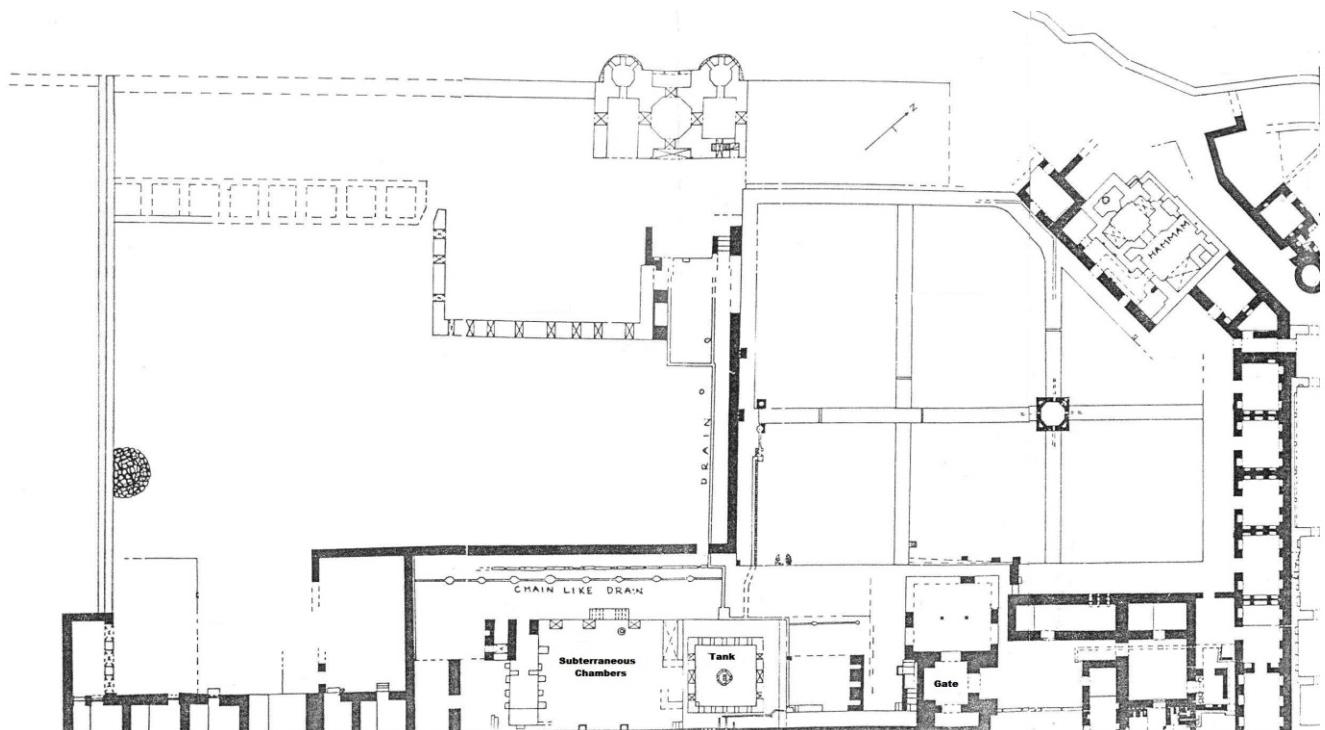


Fig. 10: Plan II

and a *Chahārbāgh*. The affiliations of this complex along with the structures on the ridge (having a couple of under-ground chambers), as well as the pavilions below, with Shahjahan's period become apparent through a profuse use of carvo-intaglio designs and shell-plaster which are typical of Shahjahan's reign.

The year 1654 appears to have been the last when Shahjahan visited his palace at Fathpur Sikri. By 1656-57, he got involved in the war of succession between his sons, which resulted in his being imprisoned at the Fort of Agra by his own son, the future Emperor Aurangzeb.

From this date onwards we hear very little of Fathpur Sikri, until decades later when in 1719 Fathpur again attracted some attention with the coronation ceremony of the captive king Muhammad Shah 'Rangila'.

Thus we see that Fathpur Sikri's decline was a decline in the status from a capital city of the Empire, to that of an ordinary town. Still it remained as an important mercantile centre and a favoured Imperial spot at least till the reign of Shahjahan. Till this date, as in the age of Jahangir, it survived not only as a place of pilgrimage for the disciples of Shaikh Salim

Chishti, but also as an important centre of production of the carpet industry and Indigo manufacture. It was not a city built and then abandoned during the same reign. More importantly this change of status was due to the exigencies of an Empire and not due to some water scarcity.

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## TEMPLE DESECRATION AND INDO-MUSLIM STATES

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**-Richard M. Eaton**

In recent years, especially in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992, much public discussion has arisen over the political status of South Asian temples and mosques, and in particular the issue of temples desecrated or replaced by mosques in the pre-British period. While Hindu nationalists like Sita Ram Goel have endeavoured to document a pattern of wholesale temple destruction by Muslims in this period,<sup>1</sup> few professional historians have engaged the issue, even though it is a properly historical one. This essay aims to examine the available evidence of temple desecration with a view to asking, What temples were in fact desecrated in India's pre-modern history? When, and by whom? How, and for what purpose? And above all, what might any of this say about the relationship between religion and politics in pre-modern India? This is a timely topic, since many in India today are looking to the past to justify or condemn public policy with respect to religious monuments. Much of the contemporary evidence on temple desecration cited by Hindu nationalists is found in Persian materials translated and published during the rise of British hegemony in India. Especially influential has been the eight-volume *History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, first published in 1849 and edited by Sir Henry M. Elliot, who oversaw the bulk of the translations, with the help of John Dowson. But Elliot, keen to contrast what he understood as the justice and efficiency of British rule with the cruelty and despotism of the Muslim rulers who had preceded that rule, was anything but sympathetic to the 'Muhammadan' period of Indian history. As he wrote in the book's original preface:

The common people must have been plunged into the lowest depths of wretchedness and despondency. The few glimpses we have, even among the short Extracts in this single volume, of Hindus slain for disputing with Muhammadans, of

general prohibitions against processions, worship, and ablutions, and of other intolerant measures, of idols mutilated, of temples razed, of forcible conversions and marriages, of proscriptions and confiscations, of murders and massacres, and of the sensuality and drunkenness of the tyrants who enjoined them ,show us that this picture is not overcharged...<sup>2</sup>

With the advent of British power, on the other hand, 'a more stirring and eventful era of India's History commences...when the full light of European truth and discernment begins to shed its beams upon the obscurity of the past.'<sup>3</sup>

Noting the far greater benefits that Englishmen had brought to Indians in a mere half century than Muslims had brought in five centuries, Elliot expressed the hope that his published translations 'will make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and the equity of our rule.'<sup>4</sup>

Elliot's motives for delegitimizing the Indo-Muslim rulers who had preceded English rule are thus quite clear. Writing on the pernicious influence that this understanding of pre-modern Indian history had on subsequent generations, the eminent historian Mohammad Habib once remarked: 'The peaceful Indian Mussalman, descended beyond doubt from Hindu ancestors, was dressed up in the garb of a foreign barbarian, as a breaker of temples, and an eater of beef, and declared to be a military colonist in the land where he had lived for about thirty or forty centuries...The result of it is seen in the communalistic atmosphere of India today.'<sup>5</sup>

Although penned many years ago, these words are relevant in the context of current controversies

<sup>1</sup> See Sita RamGoel, *Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them*, vol.1 : A Preliminary Survey (NewDelhi : Voice of India, 1990); vol.2 : The Islamic Evidence (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, trans , and eds ,*The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, 8 vols (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, n.d.), I: xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. I: xvi.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. I: xxii, xxvii.

<sup>5</sup> K.A.Nizami, ed., *Politics and Society during the Early Medieval Period: Collected Works of Professor Mohammad Habib* (NewDelhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), 1:12.



Fig. 11: An artistic rendition of the popular myth of temple desecration

over the history of temple desecration in India. For it has been through selective translations of pre-modern Persian chronicles, together with a selective use of epigraphic data, that Hindu nationalists have sought to find the sort of irrefutable evidence one of Goel's chapters is entitled 'From the Horse's Mouth' that would demonstrate a persistent pattern of villainy and fanaticism on the part of pre-modern Indo-Muslim conquerors and rulers. In reality, though, each scrap of evidence in the matter requires scrutiny. Consider an inscription dated 1455, found over the doorway of a tomb shrine in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, formerly the capital of Malwa. The inscription, a 42 verse Persian ghazal, mentions the destruction of a Hindu temple by one 'Abdullah Shah Changal during the reign of Raja Bhoja, a renowned Paramara king who had ruled over the region from 1010 to 1053. In his book Hindu Temples: What Happened to Them, Sita Ram Goel accepts the inscription's reference to temple destruction more or less at face value, as though it were a contemporary newspaper account reporting an objective fact.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike Goel, however, the text is concerned not with documenting an instance of temple destruction, but

with narrating and celebrating the fabulous career of 'Abdullah Shah Changal, the saint who is buried at the site of the tomb. A reading of a larger body of the text reveals, infact, a complex historiographical process at work:

This centre became Muhammadan first by him [i.e., 'Abdullah Shah Changal], (and) all the banners of religion were spread. ( I have heard) that a few persons had arrived before him at this desolate and ruined place. When the muezzin raised the morning cry like the trumpet-call for the intoxicated sufis, the infidels (made an attack from) every wall (?) and each of them rushed with the sword and knife. At last they (the infidels) wounded those men of religion, and after killing them concealed(them ) in a well. Now this (burial place and) grave of martyrs remained a trace of those holy and pious people.

When the time came that the sun of Reality should shine in this dark and gloomy night, this lion-man ['Abdullah Shah Changal] came from the centre of religion to this old temple with a large force. He broke the images of the false deities, and turned the

<sup>6</sup> Goel, Hindu Temples, 2:115-16. Goel does, however, consider it more likely that the event took place during the reign of Raja Bhojall in the late thirteenth century than during that of Raja Bhojal in the eleventh century.

idol-temple into a mosque. When Rai Bhoj saw this, through wisdom he embraced Islam with the family of all brave warriors. This quarter became illuminated by the light of the Muhammadan law , and the customs of the infidels became obsolete and abolished. Now this tomb since those old days has been the famous pilgrimage-place of a world. Graves from their oldness became levelled (to the ground), (and) there remained no mount on any grave. There was also (no place) for retirement, where in the distressed darvish could take rest. There upon the king of the world gave the order that this top of Tur [Mount Sinai] be built a new. The king of happy countenance, the Sultan of horizons (i.e., the world), the visitors of whose courts are Khaqan (the emperor of Turkistan) and Faghfur (the emperor of China), 'Alau-d-Din Wad-dunya Abu'l Muzaffar, who is triumphant over his enemies by the grace of God, the Khilji king Mahmud Shah, who is such that by his justice the world has become adorned like paradise, he built afresh this old structure, and this house with its enclosure again became new.<sup>7</sup>

The narrative divides a remembered past into three distinct moments. The first is the period before the arrival of the Hero, 'Abdullah Shah Changal. At this time a small community of Muslims in Malwa, with but a tenuous foot hold in the region, were martyred by local non Muslims, their bodies thrown into a well. The narrative's second moment is the period of the Hero, who comes from the 'center of religion' (Makka?), smashes images, transforms the temple into a mosque, and converts to Islam the most famous king of the Paramara dynasty deeds that collectively avenged the martyred Sufi sand, most importantly, served to (re)establish Islam in the region. The narrative's third moment is the period after the Hero's life time when his grave-site, although a renowned place of pilgrimage, had suffered from neglect. Now enters the narrative's other hero, Sultan Mahmud Khalaji the 'king of the world' and 'of happy countenance', to whose court the emperors of China and Central Asia pay respect, and by whose justice the world has become adorned like paradise. His great act was to patronize the cult of 'Abdullah Shahby (re)building his shrine which, we are told at text 'send, included a strong vault, a mosque, and a caravansarai. The inscription closes by offering a prayer that the soul of the benevolent

Sultan may last until Judgement Day and that his empire may last in perpetuity.

Although Indo-Muslim epigraphs are typically recorded near in time to the events they describe, the present one is hardly contemporary, as it was composed some four hundred years after the events to which it refers. Far from being a factual account of a contemporary incident, then, the text presents a richly textured legend elaborated over many generations of oral transmission until 1455, when the story of 'Abdullah Shah Changal and his deeds in Malwa became frozen in the written word that we have before us. As such, the narrative reveals a process by which a particular community at a particular time and place Muslims in mid-fifteenth century Malwa constructed their origins. Central to the story are themes of conversion, martyrdom, redemption, and the patronage of sacred sites by Indo-Muslim royalty, as well as, of course, the destruction of a temple. Whether or not any temple was actually destroyed four hundred years before this narrative was committed to writing, we cannot know with certainty. However, it would seem no more likely that such a desecration had actually occurred than that the renowned Raja Bhoja had been converted to Islam, which the text also claims. In any event, it is clear that by the mid-fifteenth century the memory of the destruction of a temple, projected in to a distant past, had become one among several elements integral to how Muslims in Malwa or atleast those who patronized the composition of this ghazal had come to understand their origins. The case thus suggests that caution is necessary in interpreting claims made in Indo-Muslim literary sources to instances of temple desecration. It also illustrates the central role that temple desecration played in the remembered past of an Indo-Muslim state or community.

#### TEMPLE PROTECTION AND STATE MAINTENANCE

If the idea of conquest became manifest in the desecration of temples associated with former enemies, what happened once the land and the subjects of those enemies were integrated into an Indo-Muslim state?

<sup>7</sup> G.Yazdani, ed. And trans., 'The Inscription of the Tomb of 'Abdullah Shah Changalat Dhar', *Epigraphia Indo-Moslemica* (1909), 1-5.

On this point, the data are quite clear: pragmatism as well as time honoured traditions of both Islamic and Indian state craft dictated that temples lying within such states be left unmolested. We learn from a Sanskrit inscription, for example, that in 1326, thirteen years after he annexed the northern Deccan to the Tughluq empire, Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq appointed Muslim officials to repair a Siva temple in Kalyana (in Bidar District), thereby facilitating the resumption of normal worship that had been disrupted by local disturbances.<sup>8</sup>

According to that sultan's interpretation of Islamic Law, anybody who paid the poll-tax (jizya) could build temples in territories ruled by Muslims.<sup>9</sup> Such views continued to hold sway until modern times. Within several decades of Muhammad bin Tughluq's death, Sultan Shihab al-Din (1355-73) of Kashmir rebuked his Brahman minister for having suggested melting down Hindu and Buddhist images in his kingdom as a means of obtaining quick cash. In elaborating his ideas on royal patronage of religion, the sultan referred to the deeds of figures drawn from classical Hindu mythology. . 'Some[kings]', he said, have obtained renown by setting up images of gods, others by worshipping them , some by duly maintaining them. And some, by demolishing them! How great is the enormity of such a deed! Sagara became famous by creating these and the rivers... Bhagiratha obtained fame by bringing down the Ganges. Jealous of Indra's fame , Dushyanata acquired renown by conquering the world; and Rama by killing Ravana when the latter had purloined Sita. King Shahvadina [Shihab al-Din], it will be said, plundered the image of a god; and this fact, dreadful as Yama[death], will make the men in future tremble.<sup>10</sup>

About a century later, Muslim jurists advised the future Sikandar Lodi of Delhi (r.1489-1517) that 'it is not lawful to lay waste ancient idol temples, and it

does not rest with you to prohibit ablution in a reservoir which has been customary from ancient times'.<sup>11</sup>

The pattern of post-conquest temple protection, and even patronage, is especially clear when we come to the imperial Mughals, whose views on the subject are captured in official pronouncements on Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, one of the most controversial figures in Indian history. It is well known that in the early eleventh century, before the establishment of Indo-Muslim rule in North India, the Ghaznavid sultan had made numerous, and very destructive, attacks on the region. Starting with the writings of his own contemporary and court poet, Firdawsi (d.1020), Mahmud's career soon became legend, as generations of Persian poets lionized Mahmud as a paragon of Islamic kingly virtue, celebrating his infamous attacks on Indian temples as models for what other pious sultans should do.<sup>12</sup>

But the Ghaznavid sultan never undertook the responsibility of actually governing any part of the subcontinent whose temples he wanted only plundered. Herein lies the principal difference between the careers of Mahmud and Abul-Fadl , Akbar's chief minister and the principal architect of Mughal imperial ideology. Reflecting the sober values that normally accompany the practice of governing large, multi-ethnic states, Abul-Fadl attributed Mahmud's excesses to fanatical bigots who, having incorrectly represented India as 'a country of unbelievers at war with Islam', incited the sultan's unsuspecting nature, which led to 'the wreck of honour and the shedding of blood and the plunder of the virtuous'.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, from Akbar's time (r.1556-1605) forward, Mughal rulers treated temples lying within their sovereign domain as state property; accordingly, they undertook to protect both the physical

8 P.B.Desai, 'Kalyani Inscription of Sultan Muhammad, Saka 1248', *Epigraphia Indica* 32 (1957-58) 165 -8.

9 Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*, 1324-1354, trans .H .A.R.Gibb (1929; repr .New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1986), 214.

10 S.L.Sadhu,ed.,*Medieval Kashmir,Being a Reprint of the Rajatarangini of Jonaraja, Shrivara and Shuka*,trans .J.C.Dutt(1898 ;repr .New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers & CD Distributors,1993),44-5 .

11 Nizamal-Din Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, trans .B.De,3vols(Calcutta : Bibliotheca Indica ,1927-39), 1:386

12 A useful discussion of Mahmud, his legend, and the question of iconoclasm prior to the establishment of Islamic states in India is found in Davis, *Lives*, chs 3 and 6.

13 Abu1-Fadl 'Allami, *A'in-iAkbari*, vol.3 , trans .H .S.Jarrett , ed. Jadunath Sarkar (2<sup>nd</sup> edn Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1927; repr . New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corp., 1977-78),377.

structures and their Brahman functionaries. At the same time, by appropriating Hindu religious institutions to serve imperial ends a process involving complex overlappings of political and religious codes of power the Mughals became deeply implicated in institutionalized Indian religions, in dramatic contrast to their British successors, who professed a hands-off policy in this respect. Thus we find Akbar allowing high-ranking Rajput officers in his service to build their own monumental temples in the provinces to which they were posted.<sup>14</sup>

His successors went further. Between 1590 and 1735, Mughal officials repeatedly oversaw, and on occasion even initiated, the renewal of Orissa's state cult, that of Jagannath, in Puri. By sitting on a canopied chariot while accompanying the cult's annual car festival, Shah Jahan's officials ritually demonstrated that it was the Mughal emperor, operating through his appointed officers (mansabdar), who was the temple's and hence the god's ultimate lord and protector.<sup>15</sup>

Such actions in effect projected a hierarchy of hybridized political and religious power that descended downward from the Mughal emperor to his mansabdar, from the mansabdar to the god Jagannath and his temple, from Jagannath to the sub-imperial king who patronized the god, and from the king to his subjects. For the Mughals, politics within their sovereign domains never meant annihilating prior authority, but appropriating it within a hierarchy of power that flowed from the Peacock Throne to the mass of commoners below. Such ideas continued in force into the reign of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), whose orders to local officials in Benares in 1659 clearly indicate that Brahman temple functionaries there, together with the temples at which they officiated, merited state protection:

In these days information has reached our court that several people have, out of spite and rancour, harassed the Hindu residents of Benares and nearby places, including a group of Brahmins who are in charge of ancient temples there. These people want to remove those Brahmins from their charge of temple-keeping, which has caused them

considerable distress. Therefore, upon receiving this order, you must see that nobody unlawfully disturbs the Brahmins or other Hindus of that region, so that they might remain in their traditional place and pray for the continuance of the Empire.<sup>16</sup>

By way of justifying this order, the emperor noted that, 'According to the Holy Law (shariat) and the exalted creed, it has been established that ancient temples should not be torn down.' On this point, Aurangzeb aligned himself with the theory and the practice of Indo Muslim ruling precedent. But then he added, 'nor should new temples be built' a view that broke decisively from Akbar's policy of permitting his Rajput officers to build their own temple complexes in Mughal territory. Although this order appears to have applied only to Benares many new temples were built elsewhere in India during Aurangzeb's reign.<sup>17</sup>

## TEMPLE DESECRATION AND STATE MAINTENANCE

It seems certain that Indo-Muslim rulers were well aware of the highly charged political and religious relationship between a royal Hindu patron and his client-temple. Hence, even when former rulers or their descendants had been comfortably assimilated in to an Indo-Muslim state's ruling class, there always remained the possibility, and hence the occasional suspicion, that a temple's latent political significance might be activated and serve as a power-base to further its patron's political aspirations. Such considerations might explain why it was that, when a subordinate non-Muslim officer in an Indo-Muslim state showed signs of disloyalty and especially if he engaged in open rebellion the state often desecrated the temple(s) most clearly identified with that officer. After all, if temples lying within its domain were understood as state property, and if a government officer who was also a temple's patron demonstrated disloyalty to the state, from a juridical standpoint ruling authorities felt justified in treating that temple as an extension of the officer, and hence liable for punishment.

14 Catherine B.Asher, 'The Architecture of Raja Man Singh: a Study of Sub Imperial Patronage,' in Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 183-201.

15 P. Acharya, 'Bruton's Account of Cuttack and Puri,' *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, 10(3) (1961) 4616 Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1911), 689-90. Order to Abu1-Hasanin Benares, dated 28 Feb., 1659. My translation. The 'continuance of the empire', of course, was always forefront on the minds of the Mughals, regardless of what religious functionary was praying to which deity.

17 See Eaton, *Rise of Islam*, 184-5, 263

Thus in 1478, when a Bahmani garrison on the Andhra coast mutinied, murdered its governor, and entrusted the fort to Bhilmraj Oriyya, who until that point had been a Bahmani client, the sultan personally marched to the site and, after a six-month siege, stormed the fort, destroyed its temple, and built a mosque on the site.

A similar thing occurred in 1659, when Shivaji Bhonsle, the son of a loyal and distinguished officer serving the 'Adil Shahi sultans of Bijapur, seized a government port on the northern Konkan coast, thereby disrupting the flow of external trade to and from the capital.

Responding to what it considered an act of treason, the government deputed a high-ranking officer, Afdal Khan, to punish the Maratha rebel. Before marching to confront Shivaji himself, however, the Bijapur general first proceeded to Tuljapur and desecrated a temple dedicated to the goddess Bhavani, to which Shivaji and his family had been personally devoted.

We find the same pattern with the Mughals. In 1613 while at Pushkar, near Ajmer, Jahangir ordered the desecration of an image of Varaha that had been housed in a temple belonging to an uncle of Rana Amar of Mewar, the emperor's arch-enemy. In 1635 his son and successor, Shah Jahan, destroyed the great temple at Orchha, which had been patronized by the father of Raja Jajhar Singh, a high-ranking Mughal officer who was at that time in open rebellion against the emperor. In 1669, there arose a rebellion in Benares among landholders, some of whom were suspected of having helped Shivaji, who was Aurangzeb's arch enemy, escape from imperial detention. It was also believed that Shivaji's escape had been initially facilitated by Jai Singh, the great-grand son of Raja Man Singh, who almost certainly built Benares's great Visvanat temple. It was against this background that the emperor ordered the destruction of that temple in September, 1669.<sup>18</sup>

About the same time, serious Jat rebellions broke out

in the area around Mathura, in which the patron of that city's congregational mosque had been killed. So in early 1670, soon after the ring-leader of these rebellions had been captured near Mathura, Aurangzeb ordered the destruction of the city's Keshava Deva temple and built an Islamic structure [Id-gah) on its site.<sup>19</sup>

Nine years later, the emperor ordered the destruction of several prominent temples in Rajasthan that had become associated with imperial enemies. These included temples in Khandela patronized by refractory chieftains there; temples in Jodhpur patronized by a former supporter of Dara Shikoh, the emperor's brother and arch-rival; and the royal temples in Udaipur and Chitor patronized by Rana Raj Singh after it was learned that that Rajput chieftain had withdrawn his loyalty to the Mughal state.

Considerable misunderstanding has arisen from a passage in the Ma'dthir- i' Alamgiri concerning an order on the status of Hindu temples that Aurangzeb issued in April 1669, just months before his destruction of the Benares and Mathura temples. The passage has been construed to mean that the emperor ordered the destruction not only of the Visvanath temple at Benares and the Keshava Deva temple at Mathura, but of all temples in the empire.<sup>20</sup>

The passage reads as follows:

Orders respecting Islamic affairs were issued to the governors of all the provinces that the schools and places of worship of the irreligious be subject to demolition and that with the utmost urgency the manner of teaching and the public practices of the sects of these misbelievers be suppressed.<sup>21</sup>

The order did not state that schools or places of worship be demolished, but rather that they be subject to demolition, implying that local authorities were required to make investigations before taking action.

18 Surendra Nath Sinha, *Subah of Allahabad under the Great Mughals* (New Delhi: Jamia Millia Islamia , 1974), 65-8; Asher, Architecture, 254 , 278; Saqi Musta'idd Khan, *Ma'dthir-i' Alamgiri* (Calcutta : Bibliotheca Indica , 1871),88.

19 Saqi Musta'idd Khan, *Maasir-i'Alamgiri*, trans . J. Sarkar (Calcutta : Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1947), 57-61; Asher, Architecture, 254.

20 See Goel, *Hindu Temples*, 2: 78-9 ,83 ; Sri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn: London: Asia Publishing House, 1962), 132-3; Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966), 98n.

21 Saqi Musta'idd Khan, *Ma'dthir-i' Alamgiri*, text ,81 .My translation. Cf.Saqi Musta'idd Khan, *Maasir-i-'Alamgiri: a History of the Emperor Aurangzeb -'Alamgir*, trans. Jadunath Sarkar (Lahore :Suhail Academy, 1981), 51-2

More importantly, the sentence immediately preceding this passage provides the context in which we may find the order's over all intent.

On 8 April, 1669, Aurangzeb's court received reports that in Thatta, Multan, and especially in Benares, Brahmins in 'established schools' (madaris-imuqarrar) had been engaged in teaching false books (kutub-ibdtila) and that both Hindu and Muslim' admirers and students' had been travelling over great distances to study the 'ominous sciences' taught by this 'deviant group'.<sup>22</sup>

We do not know what sort of teaching or 'false books' were involved here, or why both Muslims and Hindus were attracted to them, though these are intriguing questions. What is clear is that the court was primarily concerned, indeed exclusively concerned, with curbing the influence of a certain 'mode' or 'manner' of teaching (tawr-idars-o-tadris) within the imperial domain. Far from being, then, a general order for the destruction of all temples in the empire, the order was responding to specific reports of an educational nature and was targeted at investigating those institutions where a certain kind of teaching had been taking place.

In sum, apart from his prohibition on building new temples in Benares, Aurangzeb's policies respecting temples within imperial domains generally followed those of his predecessors. Viewing temples within their domains as state property, Aurangzeb and Indo-Muslim rulers in general punished disloyal Hindu officers in their service by desecrating temples with which they were associated. How, one might then ask, did they punish disloyal Muslim officers? Since officers in all Indo-Muslim states belonged to hierarchically ranked service cadres, Infractions short of rebellion normally resulted in demotions in rank, while serious crimes like treason were generally punished by execution, regardless of the perpetrator's religious affiliation. No evidence, however, suggests that ruling authorities attacked public monuments like mosques or Sufi shrines that had been patronized by disloyal or rebellious officers. Nor were such monuments desecrated when one Indo-Muslim kingdom conquered another and annexed its territories. To the contrary, new rulers were quick to honour and support the shrines

of those Chishti shaykhs that had been patronized by those they had defeated. As we have seen, Babur, upon seizing Delhi from the last of the city's ruling sultans in 1526, lost no time in patronizing the city's principal Chishti tomb-shrines. The pattern was repeated as the Mughals expanded into provinces formerly ruled by Indo-Muslim dynasts. Upon conquering Bengal in 1574, the Mughals showered their most lavish patronage on the two Chishti shrines in Panduathose o f Shaykh 'Ala 'al-Haqq (d.1398) and Shaykh Nur Qutb-i'Alarn(d.1459)that had been the principal objects of state patronage by the previous dynasty of Bengal sultans.<sup>23</sup>

And when he extended Mughal dominion over defeated Muslim states of the Deccan, Aurangzeb, notwithstanding his reputation for eschewing the culture of saint-cults, made sizable contributions to those Chishti shrines in Khuldabad and Gulbarga that had helped legitimize earlier Muslim dynasties there.

#### TEMPLE DESECRATION AND THE RHETORIC OF STATE BUILDING

Much misunderstanding over the place of temple desecration in Indian history results from a failure to distinguish the rhetoric from the practice of Indo-Muslim state-formation. Whereas the former tends to be normative, conservative, and rigidly ideological, the latter tends to be pragmatic, eclectic, and non-ideological. Rhetorically, we know, temple desecration figured very prominently in Indo Muslim chronicles as a necessary and even meritorious constituent of state-formation.

In 1350, for example, the poet-chronicler 'Isami gave the following advice to his royal patron, 'Ala 'al-Dln Hasan Bahman Shah, the founder of the Bahmani kingdom in the Deccan:

If you and I, O man of intellect, have a holding in this country and are in a position to replace the idol-houses by mosques and sometimes forcibly to break the Brahmanic thread and enslave women and children all this is due to the glory of Mahmud [of Ghazni]... The achievements that you make to-day will also become a story to-morrow.<sup>24</sup>

22 Ma'dthir-i'Alamgiri, text , 81 . Cf. Jadunath Sarkar, trans., Maasir-i-'Alamgiri (Lahore : Suhail Academy, 1981), 51 .

23 Eaton, Rise of Islam, 176-7.

24 'Isami , Futih u's Saldtin, trans, 1:66-7.



Fig. 12: The famous Somnath temple, which has been subjected to a series of raids on account of its wealth

But the new sultan appears to have been more concerned with political stability than with the glorious legacy his court-poet would wish him to pursue. There is no evidence that the new sultan converted any temples to mosques. After all, by carving out territory from lands formerly lying within the Delhi Sultanate, the founder of the Bahmani state had inherited a domain void of independent Hindu kings and hence void, too, of temples that might have posed a political threat to his fledgling kingdom. Unlike temple desecration or the patronage of Chishti shaykhs, both of which figured prominently in the contemporary rhetoric on Indo-Muslim state-building, a third activity, the use of explicitly Indian political rituals, found no place whatsoever in that rhetoric.

Here we may consider the way Indo-Muslim rulers used the rich political symbolism of the Ganges River, whose mythic associations with imperial kingship had been well established since Mauryan times (321-181BC). Each in its own way, the mightiest imperial formations of the early medieval peninsula the Chalukyas, the Rashtrakutas, and the Cholas claimed to have 'brought' the Ganges River down to their southern capitals, seeking thereby to legitimize their claims to imperial sovereignty.

Although the Chalukyas and the Rashtrakutas did this symbolically, probably through their insignia, the Cholas literally transported pots of Ganges water to their southern capital<sup>25</sup>

And, we are told, so did Muhammad bin Tughluq in the years after 1327, when that sultan established Daulatabad, in Maharashtra, as the new co-capital of the Delhi Sultanate's vast, all-India empire.<sup>26</sup> In having Ganges water carried a distance of forty days' journey from North India<sup>27</sup> for his own personal use, the sultan was conforming to an authentically Indian imperial ritual. Several centuries later, the Muslim sultans of Bengal, on the occasion of their own coronation ceremonies, would wash themselves with holy water that had been brought to their capital from the ancient holy site of Ganga Sagar, located where the Ganges River emptied into the Bay of Bengal.<sup>27</sup>

No Indo-Muslim chronicle or contemporary inscription associates the use of Ganges water with the establishment or maintenance of Indo-Muslim states. We hear his only from foreign visitors : an Arab traveller in the case of Muhammad bin Tughluq, a Portuguese friar in the case of the sultans

25 Davis, Lives, 71-6 .

26 Husain, Rehla of Wn Battuta, 4.

27 Sebastiao Manrique, Travels of Fray Sebatien Manrique, 1629-1643,trans. E.Luardand H . Hosten (Oxford : Hakluyt Society, 1927), 1:77.

of Bengal. Similarly, the image of a Mughal official seated in a canopied chariot and presiding over the Jagannath car festival comes to us not from Mughal chronicles but from an English traveller who happened to be in Puri in 1633.<sup>28</sup>

Such disjunctions between the rhetoric and the practice of royal sovereignty also appear, of course, with respect to the founding of non-Muslim states. We know, for example, that Brahman ideologues, writing in chaste Sanskrit, spun elaborate tales of how warriors and sages founded the Vijayanagar a state by combining forces for a common defence of dharma from assaults by barbaric (*mleccha*) Turkic outsiders. This is the Vijayanagara of rhetoric, a familiar story. But the Vijayanagara of practical politics rested on very different foundations, which included the adoption of the titles, the dress, the military organization, the ruling ideology, the architecture, the urban design, and the political economy of the contemporary Islamicate world.<sup>29</sup> As with Indo-Muslim states, we hear of such practices mainly from outsiders, merchants, diplomats, travellers and not from Brahman chroniclers and ideologues.

## CONCLUSION

One often hears that between the thirteenth and eighteenth centuries, Indo-Muslim states, driven by a Judaeo-Islamic 'theology of iconoclasm', by fanaticism, or by sheer lust for plunder, want only and indiscriminately indulged in the desecration of Hindu temples. Such a picture cannot, however, be sustained by evidence from original sources for the period after 1192. Had instances of temple desecration been driven by a 'theology of iconoclasm', as some have claimed,<sup>30</sup> such a theology would have committed Muslims in India to destroying all temples everywhere, including ordinary village temples, as opposed to the highly selective operation that seems actually to have taken place. Rather, the original data associate instances of temple desecration with the annexation of newly conquered territories held by enemy kings whose domains lay on the path of moving military frontiers. Temple desecrations also occurred when Hindu

patrons of prominent temples committed acts of treason or disloyalty to the Indo-Muslim states they served. Otherwise, temples lying within Indo-Muslim sovereign domains, viewed normally as protected state property, were left unmolested.

Finally, it is important to identify the different meanings that Indians invested in religious monuments, and the different ways these monuments were understood to relate to political authority. In the reign of Aurangzeb, Shaykh Muhammad took refuge in a mosque believing that that structure being fundamentally apolitical, indeed above politics lay beyond the Mughal emperor's reach. Contemporary royal temples, on the other hand, were understood as highly charged political monuments, a circumstance that rendered them fatally vulnerable to outside attack. Therefore, by targeting for desecration those temples that were associated with defeated kings, conquering Turks, when they made their own bid for sovereign domain in India, were subscribing to, even while they were exploiting, indigenous notions of royal legitimacy. It is significant that contemporary inscriptions never identified Indo-Muslim invaders in terms of their religion, as Muslims, but most generally in terms of their linguistic affiliation (most typically as Turk, '*turushka*'). That is, they were construed as but one ethnic community in India amidst many others.<sup>31</sup>

In the same way, B.D. Chattopadhyaya locates within early medieval Brahmanical discourse an 'essential urge to legitimize' any ruling authority so long as it was effective and responsible. This urge was manifested, for example, in the perception of the Tughluqs as legitimate successors to the Tomaras and Cahamanas; of a Muslim ruler of Kashmir as having a lunar, Pandava lineage; or of the Mughal emperors as supporters of Rdmardjya (the 'kingship of Lord Rama').<sup>32</sup>

It is likely that Indo-Muslim policies of protecting temples within their sovereign domains contributed positively to such perceptions.

In sum, by placing known instances of temple desecration in the larger contexts of Indo-Muslim

28 P.Acharya, 'Bruton's Account of Cuttack and Puri', in *Orissa Historical Research Journal*, 10(3) (1961), 46.

29 See Phillip B. Wagoner, "'Sultan among Hindu Kings": Dress, Titles, and the Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijayanagara', *Journal of Asian Studies*, 55(4) (Nov .1996), 851-80; idem, 'Harihara Bukka, and the Sultan: the Delhi Sultanate in the Political Imagination of Vijayanagara', *'unpublished paper*.

30 See Wink, *al-Hind*, 2:294-333 .

31 See Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other', 701 .

32 Brajadulal Chattopadhyaya, *Representing the Other? Sanskrit Sources and the Muslims(8th-14<sup>th</sup> century)*(New Delhi:

state-building and state-maintenance, one can find patterns suggesting a rational basis for something commonly dismissed as irrational, or worse. These patterns also suggest points of continuity with Indian practices that had become customary well before the thirteenth century. Such points of continuity in turn, call into serious question the sort of civilizational divide between India's 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' periods first postulated in British colonial historiography and subsequently replicated in both Pakistani and Hindu nationalist schools. Finally, this essay has sought to identify the different meanings that contemporary actors invested in the public monuments they patronized or desecrated, and to reconstruct those meanings on the basis of the practice, and not just the rhetoric, of those actors. Hopefully, the approaches and hypotheses suggested here might facilitate the kind of responsible and constructive discussion that this controversial topic so badly needs.

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## The Character and Value of Mahmud's Work

(Excerpt taken from the book *Sultan Mahmud of Ghaznin*, second edition reprint in 1967)

-Mohammad Habib

All men are more or less product of their environment, and a rational criticism of Mahmud's work must begin with an examination of the spirit of his age.

**Four epochs of Muslim History** Most Mussalamans imagine that their faith has always been what it is today, or in the alternative, they deplore that it has since the time of the Pious Caliphs been subject to slow but continuous decline. This is, of course, absurd. Islam, like all other religions, has had its recurring period of spiritual rise and fall; it has been differently conceived by different people at different times; like all things really and truly human, it is always changing and never permanently the same. We are here only concerned with the broadest changes in the Muslim world, and these from the rise of Islam to the conquest of Muslim Asia by Chengiz Khan, may be divided into four parts, 1) The first period of Expansion (622-748), which includes the conquests of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Persia and Northern Africa under the Pious Caliphs and their Omayyad successors. It is an epoch characterized by fervent religious zeal, and owing the captivating appeal Islam made to the depressed classes, the conquered peoples were converted to the new faith. 2) The period of the Great Abbasid Caliphs (748-900) is a period of prosperity and peace with no conquests to its record. It is characterized by a cosmopolitan civilization in which Arabic became the language of the educated classes of all countries, while a centralized administration kept the Muslim world together. 3) The period of 'Minor Dynasties' (900-1000) is essentially a period of transition in which the administration of the Caliphs disappears, and a number of small principalities rise on its ruins. Its most prominent feature is the Persian Renaissance, which made the Persian the language of literary classes and brought a new imperialistic idea to the fore-front in place of the cosmopolitan Caliphate of the Abbasides. 4) The period of the Turko- Persian Empires (1000-1220) is to be regarded as the political expression of Persian ideals and includes the reigns of the Ghaznavide, the Seljuq and the Khwarazmian dynasties.

Mahmud was the last of the 'minor kings' and the first of the great Turko- Persian Emperors. The inspiring motive of his life and the lives of his contemporaries was not Islam but the spirit of Persian Renaissance.

**Spirit of the Persian Renaissance** The age of Mahmud of Ghaznin was devoid of the higher spirit of faith; and theological discussions, which prosper most religions is dead, diverted such zeal as excited towards a war of sects. When men find it difficult to believe in God, they try to prove Him; when they cease to love their neighbor, they attempt to convince themselves that hating him is a moral duty. The conversion of the non-Muslims was given up in favor of the more entertaining game of exterminating the 'heretic'. From east to west the Muslim world was torn by sectarian feud and the strong arm of the persecutor was called in vain to heal the troubles of a people, writhing in fanaticism but innocent of faith. From this war of hair-splitting theologians, the finer minds of Persia turned with a sense of relief to the resuscitation of their national culture; and the minor dynasties, that had grown up after the devoid of the Caliphate, gave them the protection and patronage they needed. Every provincial court became the center if the revivalist movement. Ancient Persian legends were rediscovered and popularized. The Persian language, which had been cast aside as the vernacular of the common people, assumed the dignity of a national tongue. Everyone, who could, began to turn out verses in a language singularly capable of conforming to the hardest rule of metre and rhyme, and even poets of mediocre abilities could be sure of great career. Moreover, the glories of the Kiani and the Sassanid Empires, alluring with the dream of a half-forgotten greatness, exercised on more imaginative minds a fascination which slowly but definitely drew them away from the Path of the Prophet. The change was, of course, unconscious. Like the school-men of medieval Europe, who talked as if the philosophy of Aristotle was a commentary on the Ten Commandments, the contemporaries of Mahmud were aware of no difference between the lessons of the *Shah Nama* and the principles of the Quran. Faridun and Jamshed, Kai-Kaus and Kai-Khusrau, the heroic Rustam and the Macedonian Alexander won from the rising generations the homage which all true Mussalamans should have paid to the Prophet and his Companions. Now while the Prophet and his Companions stood for certain principles to be established at all costs and had resorted to war as a means of their promulgation, the legendary heroes of Persia only evoked in their

devotees an ambition for greatness and ruthless imperialism without the sense of a moral mission, and instilled into them percepts of worldly wisdom, such as Polonious bequeathed to Laertes and such as Sadi's *Gulistan* has taught to the children of later generations- a wisdom essentially selfish in its outlook and superbly unconscious of all higher aims.

**Advent of Mahmud** Thus the new spirit, on one hand, helped the evolution of a new culture and brought an atmosphere of refinement and polish to the court and the camp; and, on the other hand, it heralded in an era of futile and purposeless wars through which provincial kings, rebellious governors, tribal chiefs and even daring robbers, expected to reach the insecure eminence of Alexander, the Great. Fighting was looked upon, thanks to the militant spirit of the Turks, as a sport for itself and an attribute of manliness, a good thing to be sought for itself- not as a painful process for the attainment of human prosperity. For a century before Mahmud, princes of 'minor dynasties' had been acting Jamshed and Kai-Khusrau, and their court poets, richly paid for the work, had proclaimed their greatness in panegyrics of which men less lost in ambition would have felt ashamed. Then came the great Mahmud to achieve that for which others had fought and died in vain, and kings and princes licked the dust humbly before the figure of a new Alexander. But the giant for all his grandeur was made of the same moral stuff as the dwarfs that had gone before. It was his abilities, not his character, that raised him to an unquestioned preeminence.

**Patron of Arts** The Literary Renaissance of Persia found in Mahmud its most magnificent, if not its most discriminating patron. Four hundred poets, with Unsuri, the poet-laureate, at their head, were in constant attendance at the Sultan's court. Their official duty was to sing his praises and the Sultan, in spite of the stinginess attributed to him, seems to have been extremely generous. Ghazari Razi, a poet from Ray, was awarded fourteen thousand *dirhams* for a *qasida* that pleased the Sultan, while the poet-laureate's mouth was thrice filled with pearls for an unpremeditated *qita*. Among others who came flocking from far and near, Farrukhi, the author of a *qasida* remarkable for its captivating rhythm, Minuchihri, who specialized in the cult of vine, and

Asjadi, who is responsible for the following well known quatrain, are most famous.<sup>1</sup>

"I do repent of wine and talk of wine;  
"Of idols fair with chins like silver fine.  
"A lip-repentance and a lustful heart-  
"O God, forgive this penitence of mine!"

But it is obvious that the Sultan's patronage, while stimulating men of decent merit to their best, would fail to reach the highest genius, which in every and in every age has scorned to tow its knees to democracies and kings. For this Mahmud is in no way to blame. Mankind has yet to discover a method for dealing with its finer products. Whatever be the element of truth in the famous Firdausi legend, the tradition that represents the great poet, in whom Persian nationalism amounted to a religion, as flying from an emperor of Afrasiyab's (Turkish) race, certainly gives us an idea of the gloom that sat oppressively on the most sensitive Persian minds. Two persons of a radically different stamp were destined to share Firdausi's fate. The great physician and biologist, Shaikh bu Ali Sina (Avicenna), refused to come to the court of a king to whom the scientist's views and his sense of personal independence would have been equally unpalatable, after flying from town to town before the agents of Mahmud's wrath, he at last found a safe asylum with the Buwaihid ruler of Ray. His friend, the mathematician-scholar Abu Rihan Alberuni, whose appreciative study of Hindu philosophy stands in such pleasant contrast with the prejudices of a stormy time, was less fortunate. Brought a prisoner from his native Khwarazm, he was thrown into prison and thence exiled to India on that life of wandering to which we owe the immortal *Kitabul Hind*.<sup>2</sup>

The poetry of Mahmud's age reflects the spirit of the time. It is brilliant but not deep. Mystic ideas had not yet become current coin, the *ghazal*, the grand vehicle of mystic emotion, had not yet been discovered. *Qasidas* (panegyric odes) in praise of generous patrons were the poet's principal occupation. The genius of Firdausi brought the *masnavi* (romance) into vogue, while his master Asadi, is credited with not very commendable invention of the *Munazirah* or strife-poems- a composition which leaves little room for poetic

1 The details of the lives of the poets cannot be given here nor an examination of their work attempted. Prof. Browne's *Literary History of Persia*, Vol. II, Chap. II and Maulana Shibli Numani's *Shirul-Ajam*, Vol. I, have put in a modern form all that is found in the old *Tazkirahs*. See also Hadi, *Studies in Persian Literature*, published by the National University, Aligarh. The Firdausi legend has been subjected to a trenchant criticism by the journal 'Urdu', edited by Maulvi Abdul Haq Sahib, which has robbed the time-honored story of all its charm.

2 Some very interesting anecdotes about Alberuni and bu Ali Sina will be found in the *Chahar Maqala* of Nizam-ul Aruzi-us-Samarqandi (Gibb's Memorial Series). A short biography of Bu Ali Sina is given in *Habibus Siyar*.



Fig. 13: Tomb of Mahmud of Ghazni

thoughts. *Qitas* (fragments) and *rubais* (quatrains) served to express poet's lighter moods. Yet the Ghaznavide poets, for all their short-comings, have a certain freshness which succeeding ages have lacked. There is no artificiality about them. They had tasted the joys of material prosperity and loved to praise the beauty of women of flesh and blood and the alluring intoxication of wine. The reality of their human emotions prevented them from falling into the meaningless verbosity of later ages; and if they lack the deeper perception of their mystic successors, whose songs begin and end with a symbolic representation of the Absolute, their poetry is at least in touch with life. The poet sang of what his audience knew and felt- the clash of arms on the field of strife, the joys of companionship in the warriors's camp, the innumerable emotions of men and women whom an artificial culture had not yet deprived of their native intensity of feelings, and, above all, of the glories and sorrows of their much-loved Iran. The thoughts and emotions of the educated men of the day were the most favored theme of the poet's verse. The great period of Persian poetry, which begins with Sadi and ends with Jami, was yet to come. Nevertheless, the constructive genius of the poet won victories more solid than the warrior's futile campaigns. Th empire of Mahmud crumbled to dust nine years after the Sultan's death. The *Shahnama* lives forever.

Mahmud's work in India is reserved for a separate discussion but the Sultan was essentially a central Asian prince. The historic soil of Ajam was the garden and the grave of Ghaznavide hopes. The cosmopolitan administration of the Caliphate had been shattered beyond the possibility of reconstruction, and the new imperialism with its secular and Persian outlook had been in the air for some generations past. Now 'imperialism' meant two things- first, a conquest of the smaller principalities that would bring all Muslim peoples, who had been infused with the spirit of Persian civilization, within the fold of a single state; and secondly, the erection of a just and beneficent administration that would reconcile every section of the subjects to their common government by an era of prosperity and peace. Mahmud's performance of the first part of his work is as remarkable as his failure to perform the second. The rise of the Ghazanavide empire struck contemporaries with wonder; but they were no less surprised with the rapidity of its fall.

A man of refinement and culture with an instinctive admiration for everything beautiful in literature and art, it was in generalship that Mahmud excelled. War was the prevailing madness, but never since the fall of the Sassanian Empire before the armies of the Second Caliph had an invader so invincible appeared on the Persian soil. The exploits of Alexander in the east were rivalled and, in fact,

surpassed. The Tartar barbarians of the north were driven pell-mell beyond the Jaxartes. The 'minor dynasties' of Persia were crushed to death. From Isfahan to Bundelkhand and from Samarkand to Gujrat, the Ghaznavide subdued every opponent and struck down every rival. The conquered people were no cowards. They fought bravely and were as willing to die as their Ghaznavide opponents.

It was Mahmud's scientific imagination that made the difference. Against the clumsy organization of the Indians and their childish trust in mere numbers, he brought into the field an army that had been trained to obey the commands of a single will. The thick-headed Tartars found to their cost that mere courage and confidence in fate were no match for the fierce onslaught of disciplined ranks. But strategy rather than tactics was Mahmud's strong point. From his throne at Ghaznin his eagle-eye surveyed everything in east and west. He knew where to strike and he always struck hard. The rapidity of his marches surprised and bewildered his opponents. The man who, in the course of a single year, overawed the Carmathians at Multan, defeated the Tartars at Balkh and yet found time enough to capture a rebellious governor on the banks of Jhelum, could not fail to create havoc among his stout-hearted but slow-moving contemporaries. And yet Mahmud, for all his daring, was the most cautious of men. He never attacked an enemy he was not strong enough to overpower. He never failed in what he undertook because he undertook nothing impossible. The Indian invasions, in which his military genius shows itself at its best, are a marvelous mixture of boldness with caution.

Administrative questions, on the other hand, never interested Mahmud, and while taking up the command of the army in person, he left the prosaic task of carrying on the government to his ministers. His civil officers had the efficiency he required; they were strict and heavy-handed and worked their machinery with the same discipline and order as their military colleagues. But they lacked the breadth of vision, which would have enabled them to supplement the conquests of their master by a farsighted statesmanship and construct a machinery of imperial administration on permanent and durable foundations. His *wazirs* were certainly clever and thorough in their methods, but like all administrative experts they were devoid of idealism; and an empire without ideals is an edifice on quick sands. For the first two years of his reign, his father's *Wazir*, Abul Abbas Fasih Ahmed bin Isfarieni, continued at his post. Abul Abbas was ignorant of Arabic and made

Persian the official language- an innovation abolished by his famous successor. But if lacking in education, he had that extensive knowledge of the affairs which was to be expected of one who had risen to be the second greatest man in the kingdom from the humble position of a clerk, and he 'worked marvels in the administration of the state and the army.' The Sultan, however, quarreled with him over the possession of a Turkish slave, and the fallen *Wazir* was tortured to death by the officers who wished to deprive him of all his wealth. Abul Abbas' successor, the great Khwaja bin Hasan Maimandi, left on his contemporaries an impression second only to that of Mahmud. A foster-brother and classmate of the Sultan, Khwaja Ahmad was distinguished throughout his life by an unimpeachable loyalty to the house of Ghaznin, which in no way interfered the stern obedience that he demanded of his subordinate for himself. His father, Hasan Maimandi, collector of revenue at Bust, was hanged by Subuktigin on a charge of peculation, but the sad event had no effect on his Son's career. It would have been difficult, if not possible, for the Sultan to embark on his conquering career without the organizing capacity of his minister to support him. An excellent scholar, an intriguer of the highest order and a stern man of business, Ahmad directed the affairs of the government for eighteen years with an efficiency none could deny. But a strong *Wazir* and a strong Sultan were really incompatible; the Khwaja's soft tongue and effusive loyalty delayed, but could not finally prevent, the inevitable rupture. His extraordinary ascendancy was painful to many, and a strong party, headed by Sultan's son-in-law, Amir Ali, and the great general Altuntash, was formed against him. The Sultan made up his mind to prove that the Khwaja was not indispensable and imprisoned him in Indian Fort. As if to show that the office could be abolished, if necessary, Mahmud refrained from appointing a *Wazir* for some time. His choice ultimately fell on Ahmad Husain bin Mikal, generally known as Hasnak. The new *Wazir*, a close personal friend of the Sultan, was remarkable for his 'conversational powers,' and unfortunately also for the 'impetuosity of his temperament,' which impelled him to take the wrong side in the succession-question that arose towards the end of Mahmud's reign.

An extensive empire had been established over the ruins of many governments. What for? We are not told that Mahmud's administration was better than which existed before, while the collection of revenue was certainly more strict.

Everybody complained that the Sultan went on conquering without being able to establish peace and order in the conquered lands. The condition of the Punjab was chaotic and other provinces fared no better. Caravan routes were unsafe, and the occasional effort by the government to provide for the safety of its merchants displayed its weakness rather than its strength. "He is a stupid fellow," a Muslim mystic is said to have remarked of him, "Unable to administer what he already possess, he yet goes out to conquer new counties." A strong sense of justice Mahmud certainly had, and many stories and anecdote are told about him, but he never went beyond deciding with acuteness and wisdom the few cases that came before him. No general effort was made to suppress the robber chiefs, whose castles prevented the inter-communication between all parts of the empire. No imperial police system was organized to perform which smaller princes present on the spot had done before. The armed and the organized population of the medieval cities and towns required but little help from the state to stand up against the forces of disorder, but even that little was not forthcoming. We have only to contrast the Ghaznavide government with the empires of the Seljuqs and the Sultans of Delhi to see the elements Mahmud woefully lacked. No laws, good or bad, stand to his name. no administrative measures of importance emanated from his acute mind, which failed to see anything greater or nobler than an ever-expanding field of military glory. The peoples forcibly brought within the empire- Indians, Afghans, Turks, Tartars and Persian- were joined together by no bond except their subordination to a common monarch. A wise, firm and beneficent administration would have reconciled them to the loss of their local liberties, but that is just what Mahmud failed to provide. The Sultan and his Officers alone were interested in the continuation of the empire; and when nine years after Mahmud's death, the Seljuqs knocked down the purposeless structure, no one cared to weep over it.

These observations will enable us to assign Mahmud his proper place in eastern history. He was essentially the pioneer of 'new imperialism' brought into vogue by the Persian Renaissance. The era of the 'Universal Muslim Caliphate' had gone, never to return, and the successor of the Prophet was no more the administrative head of the Faithful. The 'minor dynasties' had proved themselves a pest by their unceasing intrigues and purposeless wars. The only possible alternative was a 'secular empire,' or '*sultanat*' as Mahmud called it, which would unite the Muslim world together and give it peace and

prosperity it longed for. Islam had neither contemplated nor sanctioned the moral foundations of the new institution, which drew its inspiration from the ancient Persian and breathe its pagan spirit; and the *shariat*, in spite of its democratic outlook, was gradually twisted to suit the requirements of the time and ended by preaching submission to the monarch, who assumed, under the pretense of being the 'Shadow of God' (*Zilullah*), the airs of the 'divine' Sassanian emperors. The result was both good and bad. The democratic feeling, which had persisted in the social life of the Mussalmans in spite of all opposing force, was eliminated from the politics, and political subservience, from being a postulate of necessity and prudence, was elevated to the dignity of a religious duty. "Obedience to Kings," says Abul Fazl, summing up the wisdom and the folly of six hundred years, "is kind of divine worship." At the same time the monarchical idea and the secularization of politics led to much that was undoubtedly beneficial. The peoples of Ajam were welded together by their loyalty to a common king in spite of their racial differences and sectarian strifes. Moreover, it became possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live together when religion was considered a private affair to the king and the sphere of government was restricted to the secular affairs of the subjects.

To Mahmud of Ghaznin belongs the credit of being the first Muslim emperor, and to him more than anyone else the rise of 'monarchical sovereignty' among the Mussalamans is due. It does not detract from his merit that he was followed by statesmen abler than himself and by dynasties more permanent than his own. The Seljuqs of Persia and the Emperor-Sultans of Delhi surpassed him as administrators, and Chengiz and Timur in conquering might. A pioneer is bound to have his shortcomings. His Central Asian policy was devoid of statesmanship while his work in India was even more deplorable.

Though India took much of Mahmud's time, she had no place in his dreams. His real aim was the establishment of a Turko- Persian empire and the Indian expeditions were a means to that end. They gave him the prestige of a 'holy warrior,' which was required to raise him head and shoulders above the basketful of Ajami princes, every one of whom was determined to be great, while the wealth of the temples made the financial position of his kingdom secure and enabled him to organize an army which the minor princes were in no position to resist. Beyond this Mahmud, who knew the limitations of his power, did not try to go. No conquest was



Fig. 14: Mahmud of Ghazni's last success against the Jats

intended because no conquest was possible. A Muslim government over the country was beyond the region of practical politics without a native Muslim population to support it. Mahmud was no missionary; conversion was not his object; and he had too much of a good sense to waste away his army in a futile attempt to keep down a hostile population by armed garrisons. He took at a sweep-stake all that centuries of Indian industries had accumulated, and then left the Indians to rebuild, as well as they could, the ruined fortifications of their own cities and the fallen alters of their gods. He obtained the gold and the prestige he needed, and he had aspired for nothing else. Except for a passing mood at Anhilwara, he never thought of establishing his power over the country. Annexation was not his object. The addition of the Punjab to his kingdom so late as 1021-22 proves rather than disproves, his non-territorial ambitions. He had at first expected his alliance with Anandpal to enable him to penetrate to the trans-Gangetic plain. That alliance failed owing to the latter's death and Mahmud felt the necessity of having his footing somewhere in the country. Even then he seems to have looked at Lahore and Multan simply as robber's perches, from where he could plunge into Hindustan and Gujerat at will. His western campaigns, on the other hand, give evidence of a different policy. They always led to annexations, and very often Mahmud personally supervised the

establishment of his government over the conquered territory.

**Organized Anarchy of the Indians** The Sultan's great advantage over his Indian opponents was the unitary organization of his state. The resources of Ghazni were at the disposal of a single mind; the strength of Hindustan was divided among a multitude of factious *Rais*, sub-*Rais*, local chiefs and village-headmen, between whom anything like sensible cooperation was impossible. The feudal organization of the Indians, with its divided allegiance, clannish spirit and love for local independence, left them helpless before an enemy to whom feudalism and clannish spirit was alike unknown. The Ghaznavide knew and obeyed their master; the Indians had no master to obey.

The power of the *Rai* of Lahore was defied by the *Rais* subordinate to him, who refused to be relegated to be position of mere governors; and instead of meeting the enemy as the loyal generals of the chief whom his position and pre-eminence alike seemed to mark off as the national hero, they preferred to be defeated by the Ghaznavide one by one. An internal revolution, which would have placed the defensive strength of the country in the hands of a central power, was absolutely necessary if the newly-arisen enemy was to be resisted with success. But the hand

of the reformer was numbed by the time-honored customs of ages; and the tribal feuds of the Indians, their complicated system of military tenures and local rights, prevented them from mustering in full force on the field of battle. The result was defeat, disgrace, disaster. Temple after temple was plundered; the centers of Indian civilization were ruined; and neither the wisdom of the Brahman, nor the heroism of the Kshattriyas, nor the pious adoration of silent millions could prevent their idols of gold and silver from being melted into Ghaznavide coin. The Indians did not lack fighting spirit, and they had a country and a religion fully worthy of their devotion. The carnage round the Somnath Temple, the courage with which the garrison of many an unknown fort died to the last man before the unwavering Ghaznavide ranks, showed what better leadership might have achieved, and proved, that even in the hour of deepest gloom the Indians had not forgotten how to die. But their social and political custom paralyzed them.

The Ghaznavide army was composed of heterogenous material, but strict discipline, years of comradeship in arms, the memory of past victories and hopes of future spoliation and plunder, had welded Indians, Afghans, Turks and Persians together. Training had created confidence and confidence led to success. Above all, the subordination of everything to the penetrative intellect and commanding will of the Sultan gave it an irresistible momentum against its faction-ridden opponents.

**Economic motives of the Invasions** The non-religious character of the expeditions will be obvious to the critic who has grasped the silent features of the spirit of the age. They were not crusades, but secular exploits waged for the greed of glory and gold. The Ghaznavide army was not a host of holy warriors resolved to live and die for the faith; it was enlisted, and paid army of trained veterans accustomed to fight Hindus and Mussalamans alike. The missionary spirit, that might have wept over the fate of so many souls 'lost to paradise' or seen in India a fertile soil for implanting the Prophet's Faith, was denied to him. His object was lower and more realizable. Content to deprive the 'unbelievers' of their worldly goods, he never forced them to change their faith and left India the non-Muslim land he found it.

**The wealth of the Temples** For time out of mind the exports of India had been in excess of her imports and precious metals had been slowly drawn

into the country. Mines were also being worked in various provinces. The natural consequence was an ever-accumulating mass of gold and silver, which won for India a reputation for fabulous riches, and, by the time of Mahmud, had become a serious national danger. Add to it, generations of pious Hindus had gradually transferred the wealth of the country to the temples, which unlike the peasants, purse and the *Rai's* treasury, never lost what they had once gained. Plundering an enemy's place of worship was regarded by contemporaries as a legitimate act of war- the unavoidable consequence of a defeat. His Hindu opponents were infuriated, but not surprised, at what he did; they knew his motives were economic, not religious, and provided a sufficient indemnity was offered, he was not unwilling to spare their idols. He took away the gold they would have loved to retain but never compelled them to join a creed in which they did not believe. His Indian soldiers were free to blow their *sankh* and bow before their idols in Imperial Ghaznin. He accepted the principle of toleration in the restricted form in which his age understood it; and it would be futile to blame him for not rising to moral height of the generations that followed and the generations that followed and the generations that had gone before.

**Islam- a posteriori justification** No honest historian should seek to hide, and no Mussalman acquainted with his faith will try to justify, the wanton destruction of temples that followed in the wake of the Ghaznavide army. Contemporary as well as the later historians do not attempt to veil the nefarious acts but relate them with pride. It is easy to twist one's conscience; and we know only too well how easy it is to find a religious justification for what people wish to do from worldly motives. Islam sanctioned neither vandalism nor the plundering motives of the invader; no principle known to the *Shariat* justified the uncalled-for attack on Hindu princes who had done Mahmud and his subjects no harm; the wanton destruction of places of worship is condemned by the law of every creed. And yet Islam, though it was not an *inspiring motive*, could be utilized as an *posteriori justification* for what had been done. It was not difficult to identify the spoliation of non-Muslim populations with service to Islam, and persons to whom the argument was addressed found it too much in consonance with the promptings of their own interests to examine it critically. So the precepts of the Quran were misinterpreted or ignored and the tolerant policy of the Second Caliph was cast aside in order that Mahmud and his myrmidons may be able to plunder

Hindu Temples with a clear and untroubled conscience.

A religion is judged by the character of those who believe in it; their faults and their virtues are believed to be the effect of their creed. It was inevitable that the Hindus should consider Islam a deviation from the truth when its followers deviated so deplorably from the path of rectitude and justice. A people is not conciliated by being robbed of all it holds most dear, nor will it love a faith that comes to it in the guise of plundering armies and leave devastated fields and ruined cities as monuments of its victorious method for reforming the morals of a prosperous but erratic world. "Mahmud," says the observant Alberuni, "utterly ruined the prosperity of the country and performed those wonderful exploits, by which the Hindus became like atoms of dust scattered in all directions and like a tale of old in the mouth of the people. Their scattered remains cherish, of course, the most inverted hatred of all Muslims. This is the reason why Hindu sciences have retired far away from those parts of the country conquered by us, and have fled to places where our hand cannot yet reach, to Kashmir, Banaras and other places."

'The evil that men do lives after them; the good is often buried with their bones!' Mahmud's work, whatever it might have been, was swept off fifteen years after his death by the Hindu revival. 'Those who had taken up the sword perished by the sword.' East of Lahore no trace of the Mussalamans remained; moral confidence of Hinduism, won n everlasting infamy for his faith. Two centuries later, men who differed from Mahmud as widely as two human beings can possibly differ, once more brought Islam into the land. But times had changed. The arrogance of the Mussalamans had disappeared with the conquest of Ajam by the Mongolian hordes. The spirit of the Persian Renaissance had blossomed and died, and the new mysticism, with its cosmopolitan tendencies and with doctrines which did not essentially differ from what the Hindu *rishis* had taught in ancient days, made possible that exchange of ideas between men of the two creeds which Alberuni had longed for in vain. Instead of the veterans who had crossed the frontier in search of their winter-spoils, there came a host of refugees from the burning villages of Central Asia, longing for a spot where they could lay their heads in peace and casting aside, all hopes of returning to the land of their birth. The serpent had reappeared but without his poisonous fangs. The intellectual history of medieval India begins with the advent of Shaikh Moinuddin of Ajmere and its political history with

the accession of Sultan Alauddin Khilji; the two features which distinguish it from preceding generations are the mystic propaganda started by the Chishti Saint and the administrative and economic measures started the revolutionary Emperor. With the proper history of our country Mahmud had nothing to do. But we have inherited from him the most bitter drop in our cup. To later generations Mahmud became the arch-fanatic he never was; and in that 'incarnation' he is still worshipped by such Mussalamans as have cast off the teachings of Lord Krishna in their devotion to minor gods. Islam's worst enemies have ever been its own fanatical followers.

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## Literary Imagination and Historical Narrative: History Writing in a Matrix and Myth and Reality in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

-Ishrat Alam

In the recent past, we have witnessed attempts to deliberately pursue a project in which literary imagination is given credence over historical fact. The issue turns to ambiguities in the process, which would invariably (and in fact) lead to construction of certain structures which are given sanctity, from generation to generation, as a matter of linguistic and cultural continuity, a sort of genetic inheritance. Such a stage in history writing requires invocation of rationalism.

Much before us, Shyamaldar Dadhivadia,<sup>1</sup> popularly known as Kaviraja, grappled with such issues, he was a cautious scholar and deeply reluctant to make claims that he could not substantiate. He was legitimately skeptical and tried to check facts on the basis of elaborate consultations. He was responsible for dismantling considerable part of the inherited traditions of his time. For the present discussion we have taken up Shyamaldas' treatment of the *Padmavati*.

In order to straighten the facts Shyamaldas decided to show first no less than sixteen kings of Rawal Samar Singh's family.<sup>2</sup> He could trace Rawal Samar Singh's name in Prithvi Raj Raso. Shyamaldas claims that panegyricists and local histories (*khyats*) had created immense confusion by placing Prithvi Raj Raso in a wrong chronological order.

Shyamaldas considers Alauddin Khalji's battle with Rawal Samar Singh's son Ratan Singh to have taken place in V.S. 1359 [Hijri. 702 i.e. c.1302, with the panegyrics ballads and local histories described it as had happened with Lakshman Singh and his brother Ratan Singh and it was claimed that generations of the king were killed, they claimed that Ratan Singh's queen Padmini sacrificed her life along with many ladies by confining themselves in underground chambers.<sup>3</sup>

But Shyamaldas was not convinced with such statements, He argued that it was probably

because of the local historians' acceptance of Prithviraj Raso as truthful text and on the basis of this, they presumably concluded that it was 115 years after Shihabuddin and 201 years after the composition of the Prithviraj Raso text, it was concluded that Alauddin Khalji sieged the fort of Chittor and fought the battle with Lakshman Singh in place of Ratna Singh. Shyamaldas further argued that on the basis of inscription of V.S. 1344, it was well established that Rawal Samar Singh was the ruler of Chittor, and could have continued for another five years.<sup>4</sup> Local historians and ballads have transformed the story further. Here the argument is that many battle were fought between Rawal Ratan Singh and Alauddin Khalji which received scant attention in Persian chronicles.<sup>5</sup>

The ballads and local histories also wrote that Padmini's brothers Gora and Badal also fought against the Sultan in many battles. Rawal Ratan Singh's wife Padmini performed Sati with thousands of wives. Alauddin after conquering Chittor conferred it on his son Khizr Khan and Chittor fort was renamed as Khizrabad and he performed the function of declaration of his successor. Shyamaldas argues that Alauddin had ascended the throne after killing his uncle Jalaluddin Khalji in Hijri 695 [V.S. 1353= c. 1296] and after besieging the fort for six months in Hijri 703 [V.S. 1360 = c.1303 August] he won the fort; and died on 6 Shawwal 713 [V.S. 1373 Paush Shukla 7= c.22 December 1316]. This proves clearly that Alauddin Khalji had fought against Rawal Samar Singh's son Ratan Singh and it was mentioned in *Tarikh-i-Farishta* that people of Chittor had thrown the people of Alauddin from the fort when Alauddin's death was near. According to Shyamaldas this reference was to Maharaja Bhuvan Singh because it was claimed in the Jaina temple of Ranpur that Maharana Bhuvan Singh had defeated Alauddin Khalji. Prior to Bhuvan Singh, nine generation, which meant from Ratan Singh to Prithvipal were

<sup>1</sup>G.N. Sharma, in S.P. Sen, *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, Calcutta, 1973, pp.281-90 same can be found in G.N. Sharma and V.S. Bhatnagar, eds. *The Historians and Sources of the History of Rajasthan*, Jaipur, 1992, pp.57-70; Nina Sharma and Indu Shekhar, *Becoming a Modern Historians in Princely India, An Intellectual Aspect of Shyamaldar and His Vir Vinod*, London, 2015, Shankar Goyal, *Historians and Historiography in Modern Rajasthan*, Delhi, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Shyamaldas, Veer Vinod, 1886, repr. 1986, Delhi, p.283.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Shyamaldas, p.284.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

killed in battles for capturing Chittor. When Rahap's elder brother Mahap was returning to Dungarpur, disappointed, then his younger brother Rahap continued to Attack Chittor to capture the fort. He had gone to the extent of imprisoning their enemy Mokal Padiya of Mandovar and snatched his title Maharana and started getting himself called Maharana. Shyamal Das readily accepted that Rahap had established the village Sisodia in the hills of Kumhalmer. In the beginning these Maharanas had purohits from the caste of Chouisa Brahmins who continued to stay with Mahap whose descendants continued to be purohits of Dungarpur, and Rahap's advisor was a Sarsal Palliwal Brahmin whom Rahap had appointed as his Purohit. Rahap continued to attack Chittor from Aravalli hills and eventually was killed in a battle. After him Bhavan Singh had captured fort of Chittor and during that period after Alauddin Khalji's death there was no attention (*baz purs* = Repeated inquiry, minutes search; a revision, an examination) was paid to Chittor fort. After sometime of accession of Muhammad Tughlaq (Hijri, 725 Rabi ul Awwal [S.V. 1381 Phalgun = c. February 1325], he sent his forces to capture Chittor. This was the time of Lakshman Singh who died fighting along with Ari Singh the imperial forces and whose brother Ajay Singh went into the Aravalli fills and after sometime died there.

Muhammad Tughlaq had got a mosque constructed at Chittor and it had an inscription there, (reproduced below). Muhammad Tughlaq handed over the fort to Maldev Songara because it was believed that the fort would not remain in control of anyone except. Shyamal Das questions the assertion circulated through ballads and local narratives that Lakshman Singh had fought many battles against Alauddin Khalji. Shyamal Das argues that by that thirteenth generation had passed off. So he discounted all suggestions of battles fought between Alauddin Khalji and Lakshman Singh. Though, Shyamaldas considered it could have been possible with Muhammad Tughlaq. Though it was likely that from Rawal Batan Singh to Ajay Singh these were fifteen kings of those 15, 13 were killed fighting for Chittor. It is quite possible that ballads considered that all kings were killed in the battle. However, Shyamal Das examined inscription of Raanpur Jaina temple and found that the names of some of the kings did not find any mention. It had after Rawal Samar Singh, Bhuvan Singh, Jay Singh, Lakshman Singh, Ari Singh and Ajay Singh which suggested that those names had been omitted they might have been Rawal Samar Singh's sons or grandsons who were killed in

the battle for Chittor fort and Bhuvan Singh might have been younger brothers of Ratan Singh who might have omitted names of other and could have got his brother Samar Singh coroneted, similarly Bhim Singh and Jay Singh were brothers, who left his elder brother Bhim Singh. Bhuvan Singh blessed. Shyamal Das says that it was a well established practice among the Rajputs but that did not mean that they were not there.

His another argument is that in the inscriptions of Kumbhal mer Lakhman Singh and Ari Singh were mentioned and those inscriptions were composed after 125 years of those Rajas and in those inscriptions there was not mention of any fight between Alauddin Khalji because of that Shyamal Das refuses to accept the narratives of ballads and local histories.

Shyamaldas takes notes of Padmavat and observed that several stories relating to her were in circulation. Some people believed that Rawal Ratan Singh's wife queen Padmani was the daughter of king of Sinhala which Shyamaldas argued was not surprising for the kings of the said island were of Suryavanshi origin sine long<sup>6</sup> and it was quite likely that there should have been some relations with them.<sup>7</sup>

But according to Shyamaldas, people like Malik Muhammad Jaisi had assumed many imaginary concepts. He had no objections to such projects but the real story was not on those lines. The queen had got an adroit magician Ragunath from her parents side who used to entertain Rawal Ratan Singh through his magical feats. Once Ratan Singh got angry with him and exiled him. He approached Alauddin Khalji and won his favour. He used to praise the beauty of Queen Padmavati before the Sultan. The Sultan was looking for a pretext to invade Chittor. The Sultan wrote to Ratan Singh to send his queen to his court. This infuriated the King Rawal Ratan Singh. Rawal Ratan Singh also wrote an inflammatory letter to Alauddin Khalji which eventually led to an unpleasant and devastating battle between Alauddin Khalji. Two of the brothers of Queen. Gora and Badal. Both died. Queen Padmavati performed Sattee alongwith other Rajput ladies.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus we find Shyamal Das makes a clear distinction between what was assumed and what had actually happened on the basis of his admirable

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.286.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

painstaking research. He tried to distinguish between myth and history, mythology might not be narrating the reality. It may be narrating some story or stories which might be in circulation in society as assumption of that society which produces those myths. He dismantles them on the rocks of hard facts. But at the same time it is quite intriguing that he is narrating Padmavati's story after freeing it from myth. Possibly he is conceding to the society which had written or created those stories. Since they associate themselves with some of those stories. He has successfully shown that it was a myth and enquired further into it. He underlines the importance of reliable evidence while making a historical generalization. He enters into a dialogue with his evidence, asks questions, verifies them, their contents, and searches for answer. This should serve as guiding principles for our researches.

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# Book Review

## Time as a Metaphor of History by Romila Thapar, 1997

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Time as a Metaphor of History is an extended version of the Krishna Bharadwaj Memorial Lectures delivered at Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1993 later formulated into a book in 1996. A momentous work by the prolific Indian Historian expounding the very fundamentals of Historical time and development of Time Reckoning in the Indian context. The author dismantled the Orientalist bias on Indian notions of time and history being primarily Cyclic (characterised by Primitive, archaic societies of repetitive patterns of events) and thus negating the possibility of demarcating Myth from History. She picked upon the argument forwarded by James Mill on the Indian notions of time being diametrically opposite to Linear Time leading to dialectical change towards progress directed from Judeo-Christian and Islamic faith unparalleled in Indian sources. She grounds her conjecture upon

- Manu's Dharmashastra
- Mahabharata
- Puranas
- Al Beruni's stances upon astronomical and mathematical learnings of Indian history and the fallacy of cross-referring Biblical information from Indian sources. Thus, the extensive work is divided into chapters talking on the dissemination over Mythic times versus Historical time in the Indian sources. A dialogue between the two categories of time i.e Linear and Cyclic time has sought cadence in the Puranic concepts to further the quest of time Reckoning. The link between Time and History has set History as being "narrative of human activities of the past narrated in the present".

### • Overview

The book embarks upon comprehending a systematic dissection of Indian theories of Historical time from Puranic and cosmological dating methods of *yuga* and *Kalpa* towards the development of astronomical studies by the possible interactions with Hellenistic notions towards a conscious deviation between myth(fiction) and history (facts) based on the Generational and Genealogical Reckonings by Indian Kings upto the finale of Mahabharata. The discourse is further taken by Buddhist and Jain themes of Messianic return aligning to those of Linear time notions formulating chronologies that are entirely Historical. The ideas of Time

Reckoning based on Cosmology was propounded on Cyclical Theory treating the whole universe as an ordered whole and governed by laws. This lead to the development of a Universal Solar Calendar based on planetary movements influenced from Greco-Roman traditions of horoscopy. In *Jyotishastra* the unit of measuring time was taken as the 5 year long *yuga*. The *kalpa* assessment of time found ground in Buddhist, Jain and *Ajivika* concepts of beginning of time by defeating a sense of controllable time. The 4 *Yugas* descending in arithmetical progression from good times towards bad was framed on the cosmic cycle calculations. The Author has highlighted the interesting link between Indian and West Asian (Babylonian and Biblical) chronologies in giving magical preferences to potency. The successive chapter deals with a remarkable new development in Indian astronomy owing to Hellenistic influences. The astronomical studies of Aryabhatta, Yevanesvara's *Yavana-Jataka* and Minaraja's *Vrddha-yavanajataka* in 4th century marked a clear deviation of theories of astronomy with that of Puranic learning. This marked the coming of Solar Astronomy as one manifestation of divergence. Towards Decline: the end of Puranic Age marks the progress of the Mahayuga, which is determined by moral decline as pointed by Jayasimha. The chapter deals with the symbolic depiction of Dharma as bull deity and its four legs signifying the 4 *Yugas* ranging from utopia of *satya* age towards kali determined by social change as *shudra* ascension to power and desecration of Puranic caste rankings upto the arrival of Messianic figure *kalkin* and restoration of Puranic rites.

• **On Myth and History:** Dissecting the dichotomy of the two facets of Indian History, the writer linked myth pertaining to the sacred and History to Profane. The book alludes to the crucial quest of segregating myth from History in cosmological time. Vishnu Purana perception of past is in terms of the genesis of universe and creation thus lacking in social detail which is central to historical knowledge. This deficiency led to a departure of reckoning from Cosmology towards more humane mediums. The idea of tracing time in terms of Genealogies and generational narratives of the past by kings for legitimising kingship

evolved on solar (*surya*) and Lunar (*chandra*) segmentary lineage systems which led to an authentic perception of History to some extent. Genealogical Reckonings are characterised as pivotal for lineage based societies where birth determined social status. The third section of the chapter picks up the catastrophic war of Mahabharata as another time marker and the start of *kaliyuga*, determined by termination of *kshatriya* clans and power wrested by *sudras/sabaras* or Primitive forest dwellers as Kings. The predictive tense to future aligns to the Linear time notions. Quoting the author verbatim, - ‘Prophesying history is a mechanism for using past to lay claim to controlling future but it has its limitations’ points at the fact that prophecy has to stop when the text was composed. Concludes as, Dynastic time takes the form of Historical chronology and a distinction between myth and history appeared. *Kaliyuga* thus, heralded a statement historical change in the Indian context. The last chapter of the Vishnu Purana is headed towards a dialogue between Linear and Cyclic time and their possible coexistence in Indian context as the author sums it, ‘historical eras located King and dynasties firmly in time’ hinting towards the start of Eras or Samvatsara determined by ascensions/accessions like the Gupta era, Chalukya-Vikrama era determined by Dynasty and state apparatus facilitating precise dating methods. • Towards the development of Buddhist Historiography, the author attributes the removal of discrepancies and history becoming more recognisable over ritualism and a clear development of context and location was displayed in the Buddhist chronicles. Apart from them, from 7 th century Caritra of Harsha by Bana and Chamba Vamsavali displayed a sense of chronology that was historical.

- Eschatology :** Heading towards the last chapter of the book, the author alludes to the fact that the development of new chronology didn’t necessitate a break from Cyclic time. And unlike Semitic religions no singular deity controlled time but the Cyclic notion of final destruction and arrival of Messianic figure and the beginning of yet another Golden age was not unparalleled in Linear time perception. The *Jaina* Cosmology also emphasizes on a savior figure and the symbolism of *kalpa* by the medium of a spoked wheel. The 10t Vishnu Avtara was put parallel to the Maitrya Buddha figure of Mahayana.

- Conclusive Remarks :** Romila Thapar has deciphered the various categories of historical time adopted in different cultures as in the case of Indian

history and displayed that this inquiry remains a multifaceted one. The book has debunked the commonly held presupposition that the adoption of Cyclic time renders a history as being stunted, instead it’s a manifestation of the complexities that the history of a geographical expression is laden with. Thus, these pre-notions need a fresh reconsideration in dealing with concepts of time and History.



